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Curiouser & Curiouser

Challenging conventions & celebrating the unusual

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Letter from the Editors:

Following on from the success of Materiality/Intangibility in 2010 (see Museological Review, issue 15), the students of the School of Museum Studies here at the University of Leicester once again held a symposium in 2011. Titled Curiouser and Curiouser, it was an exploration of the weird and wonderful in museums: the unconventional, the unique, and surprising, aspects the organizing committee agreed we all loved about the museum and heritage experience. This issue of Museological Review is dedicated to a selection of papers presented at the conference, which have been expanded, peer-reviewed, and scrupulously edited for your reading pleasure. Within, there are tales of hoards, ghosts, broken hearts, counterfeiting, storytelling, astronomy, and invention.

We also wanted to represent, to the best of our ability, the three-day conference itself, and to that end, in addition to the usual scholarly papers, we have included a review of the conference pre-planning and the days itself by the main organizer, Gudrun Drofn Whitehead, photos from the conference daytrip to Nottingham, and images and text from the accompanying exhibition, Apocalypse Then.

We hope this issue whets your appetite for more, and that you will attend our next conference, Museum Utopias, March 27-28, 2012.

Until next time,

Jennifer Binnie,
Serena Iervolino,
Julia Petrov,
Maria-Anna Tseliou,
and
Museobunny (the conference mascot).

Looking through the Looking Glass: An Organizer's Reflections

GUÐRÚN D. WHITEHEAD
Curiouser & Curiouser Conference Project Manager
School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester

What happens when you put nine fresh and eager PhD students together in a small room with seemingly-limitless quantities of caffeinated beverages and cakes? On the evening of January 2010 that resulted in the birth of Museobunny, a highly charismatic rabbit who would soon turn into one of the driving forces of Curiouser & Curiouser. Not only did he play an important part in our brand identity and publicity, he even turned out to be an expert in social networking and live-blogging, as well as a stylish dresser. The conference took place between the 28th and the 30th of March 2011, during which he, as well as the unusual and well-received exhibition Apocalypse Then (set in the Museum Studies building) held everything tightly together and created a sense of wholeness and uniqueness. Over the course of three days, individuals from many countries (including Estonia, the United States of America and Australia), and at various stages in their careers, from PhD researchers to academic staff and professionals and practitioners, were able to share ideas and expand their conceptual horizons.

The organizing committee set out to hold a conference where the ideas of normality and eccentricity in museums and heritage institutions would be deconstructed. What exactly is normal and what is idiosyncratic or eccentric? Definitions of what is acceptable within museums and collections are changing, catalyzed by the blurring of boundaries once enforced by such factors as national identity, socio-economic background and ethnicity. Methods of display and interpretation are also evolving along with the changing conventions. Our intention was to explore these ideas by creating three themes within which speakers were encouraged to frame their presentations. The themes were as follows: Institutions and Spaces; Collections & Collecting; and Interpretation, Research and Use.

These three strands provided the opportunity for a wide variety of responses, enabling diverse subjects to be treated, and widening accessibility to a broad spectrum of researchers. Our vision for this conference was for it to be a celebration of the unique, the unconventional

and the controversial. Therefore, alongside presentations from postgraduates, academics and professionals, the conference was seen as an opportunity to include creative events and participatory sessions, making the most of the Museum Studies building and the varied backgrounds of the participants. This format, too, challenged ideological constructs of

normality and eccentricity, questioning who has the right to define and apply these concepts. We wished to take an unusual approach to the 'unusual' and ask: what is appropriate or permissible, what it is that makes something eccentric, and why it is fascinating? Through an examination of the meaning of these terms the conference questioned whether there is a true distinction between

'conventional' and 'strange'. It explored new possibilities of definition and took an alternative stance on the standard notions of collections, collecting and interpretation.

The number of responses we received for our call for papers was overwhelming. It was clear that we, the organizers (a rather eccentric group in its own rights), were not the only ones intrigued by the eccentric and the strange. Furthermore, due to the diverse nature of the topic, we received a great number of pertinent and unusual proposals. With so many

proposals, the task of choosing a limited number of them for our conference was quite difficult. In the end we felt it justifiable to subject our delegates to a rather compact schedule in order to fit in as many talks as possible. In addition, we organized a break on the second day, when we visited Green's Mill and the Science Centre in Nottingham. This daytrip not only gave the delegates a break from a long first conference day, but it also provided them with the opportunity to network further and to explore the region.

The conference talks were organized into the following eight sessions which were spread over two days (with the daytrip to Nottingham on the second day, as previously mentioned): Museum (Un)Conventions; Museum Relationships and Loss; Weird, Wonderful, and Untidy; Science and Society; It does not Mean what you Think it Means; Stories from Spaces; Social Contexts; and Spooky Stuff. It was highly interdisciplinary, and approaches in the talks included not just museology, but sociology, history of art, and many more. The diversity of these topics allowed for experimental presentation formats and lively debates. This special edition of Museological Review features just some of the main themes that emerged during the sessions.

After all the work we put into organizing the conference it was a great pleasure seeing it come together in such a successful way. Right from the start, a friendly, professional atmosphere was created, which lasted throughout. It allowed academics, research students and professionals to come together and interact in a highly stimulating and reciprocal way. Social and professional networks have been generated because of this – not just for the organizers, but for many of the delegates too.

The conference would not have been possible were it not for the support of the School of Museum Studies and its staff, as well as the generous financial contribution of the Roberts

Fund (University of Leicester). Furthermore, the collaboration with the writer, Dan O'Donnell-Smith, proved to be an interesting challenge of integrating a creative idea into the material form of an exhibition. Finally, I would like to thank my co-organizers for their dedication, hard work and enthusiasm. With this publication, the final stage of the conference has been reached and Museobunny can finally retire with a curious journal and juicy carrot.

Institution for Mass Psychotherapy

ŽELJKA MIKLOŠEVIĆ AND DARKO BABIĆ

Abstract

This paper presents the Museum of Broken Relationships in Zagreb, Croatia, and offers a potential redefinition of the nature and the role of the museum and its use of material culture in communicating with audiences. The Museum invites people to donate artefacts which represent their former relationships. The collection is thus formed out of a need for 'emotional cleansing' by donors which might respond to similar and/or opposite needs and wishes of museum visitors. Each donated artefact, mainly a mass–produced object, is accompanied by a written explanation. It is through the interpretation of these composite museum objects, formed by texts and artefacts, that the visitors identify with or disassociate from the stories told by the objects. The aim of the paper is to use museum semiotics in order to explore the distinctive features of these objects as private, individual signs within the public context of the museum to show the processes through which they are created and experienced and the way they change an institutional practice.

Keywords: creativity, interpretation, composite museum objects, emotional.

Institution for Mass Psychotherapy

The Museum of Broken Relationships (MBR), which is the focus of this paper, belongs to that group of museums whose core element is a collection of artefacts displayed in a real, three-dimensional public space. An analysis of the MBR in this paper is concerned with the way in which material culture is used for the very formation of the idea of the museum and its development into a public institution where institutional functions and communication take different forms from those in conventional museums.

Although there have been a number of departures from the traditional notions of what museums are, of how they are formed and used, the focal point of the majority of museum institutions is still their collection of material culture. The initial museal principles of collecting, interpreting and exhibiting have changed through centuries and today they

represent activities based on academic, scientific and communicative principles. The backbone of the activity is formed by a system in which each collected artefact takes its place in a group of museum objects. By selecting material considered to be significant for a culture from its primary contexts and arranging them into collections, museums act as media for conveying and producing cultural messages. In museums material culture is collected, organized, interpreted and displayed with the purpose of developing an understanding of the workings of societies and individuals (Pearce, 1989), since artefacts serve to convey the 'values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions of a particular community or society at a given time' (Prown, 1982:1). They help us to understand certain abstract notions and to better understand ourselves and others (Miller, 2007).

Order that is established through a system of elements compared according to similarities and differences of their physical features and the things these features reflect about human life, has been the basis for research and presentation of material culture in museums for more than two centuries (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992; Bennett, 2004). Classification was usually seen as a natural organizational device because it relied on the analysis of material features which were considered to carry inherent meaning (Shanks and Tilley 2007). Those who research material culture have to 'read' from the material about the culture and society of certain people. Material culture provides the means of visualization of social relations. The key word in the discourses about material culture has been 'social' since material culture is seen as a reflection of social practices and as an agent (Shanks & Tilley, 2007: 82) in the formation of these practices. It is thus 'a symbolic practice with its own determinate meaning product which needs to be situated and understood in relation to the overall structuration of the social' (Shanks & Tilley, 2007: 86).

Museums play a key role in encoding, decoding and interpreting meanings contained within artefacts and their contexts. Compared with other communication media, the objective world of things is the museums' most distinctive and significant characteristic (Kaplan, 2005; Soafer, 2007). The authenticity of objects makes museums truthful sources of information and experience. In order to produce museum discourses, objects coming from living (or extinct) cultures are inserted into a museum code. Signs are produced by artefacts with each act of displaying (Horta 1992, Silverstone 1994, Lindauer 2006). A hat, for example, can represent a work of artistic craftsmanship, a fashion statement in a certain historical period, a sign of social status etc, when juxtaposed with other collected works within the museum taxonomy. Material items are therefore core elements in the formation of museum narratives about the external world to which they refer, or rather, narratives attempting to represent the social world. This semiotic system of museums lies at the heart of its communicational role, and thereby its social role, by providing people with a means to 'engage in and with the world' (Ravelli, 2006:5).

The collecting policy of the Museum of Broken Relationships, its approach to material culture and the nature of the objects in this museum redefines the conventional museum

semiotic system based on material culture and creates space for alternative forms of museum functions and a different way of communication. Consequently, these differences lead to questions about the very nature and role of this museum in particular within the context of the institutional discourse.

Personal Ritual – Creating Museum Objects

The Museum of Broken Relationships was first conceived as an art project by cultural manager Olinka Vištica and artist Dražen Grubišić whose broken relationship left them with things that reminded them of their time together. That is how they came up with the idea to invite people to donate artefacts related to their own broken relationships and organized an exhibition in which to show the donations. This exhibition was called the Museum of Broken Relationship and was mounted in April 2006 at the 40th Zagreb Salon, an annual national exhibition of art, architecture and design. A great interest for this project and its success at the Salon led to the creation of a travelling exhibition with the same collecting principle. The museum visited Bosnia & Herzegovina, Slovenia, Serbia, Macedonia, Germany, Slovakia, Singapore, Ireland, the Philippines, South Africa, Turkey, Indiana, Missouri, California, and various other states in the USA. The form of temporary exhibition that the museum at first assumed was turned into a public institution with a permanent address in Zagreb's Upper Town in 2010 (Fig. 1:1). The museum will continue to organize temporary exhibitions in the future, but now, people can have an address to which to send their donations as well as a place where the public can go to and see objects and their stories on a daily basis.

Figure 1:1 Museum building, 2 Sv. Cirila i Metoda Street, Zagreb

The 2006 art project was conceived and organized as a collaborative exhibit consisting of three formats – the physical part of the project with donated artefacts and stories, a web site with donated digital material such as text messages, emails and digital photographs, and a special place at the exhibition for oral confessions which were recorded and stored. In this paper, the virtual museum and the confessional are omitted from analysis since they show non- artefactual material. The main idea behind the project relied on the assumption that artefacts are:

> …'holograms' of memories and emotions - and intends with its layout to create a space of 'secure memory' or 'protected remembrance'… the individual gets rid of 'controversial objects', triggers of momentarily 'undesirable' emotions, by turning them into museum exhibits and thereby participating in the creation of a preserved collective emotional history (Grubišić & Vištica, 2006).[1]

The majority of the artefacts which were donated for the Salon exhibition, and which have been given to the museum ever since, are mass-produced objects, mostly utensils, clothing items, toys, and the like. Each artefact is accompanied with a piece of text which in some way explains its connection to a broken relationship. In contrast to the mundane material items, which can be found everywhere around us in identical or similar forms, the texts are highly individual accounts of break-ups, both in their content and form of expression. In addition to the artefacts and stories, donators are asked to provide additional information[2] such as name, country, city, email, name of the exhibit and the duration of the relationship. However, the names and emails of donors are not included in the display.

Prior to being donated to the MBR, these artefacts were kept by people as souvenirs of their former relationships. They had lost their social meaning and took on a subjective status by becoming objects that are owned rather than used (Baudrillard, 1996). As such, they were kept as materializations of past events but also of accumulated feelings. As part of their personal ritual, people project onto their ideas into material objects to give them permanence. Leach (1987) gives two ways in which we externalize our ideas - by telling stories and by creating material objects. The artefacts in question were not given their material shape by their past owners, but rather a meaning which made them significant only to their owners to whom they represent the tangible essence of a past experience. As such they are souvenirs with a personal character which makes them separate in museum contexts and therefore difficult to display successfully (Pearce, 1989). However, it is exactly personal narratives stemming from personal souvenirs that entirely form the Museum of Broken Relationships.

By offering people a possibility to creatively express their emotions the museum's goal has been to become as a place for personal cleansing. By offering 'every individual the chance to overcome the emotional collapse through creation' (Grubišić & Vištica, 2006) the museum engages its donors in a sort of ritual which could fall into the category known in anthropology as rites of affliction, performed by those who 'seek to mitigate the influence

of spirits thought to be afflicting human beings with misfortune' (Bell, 1997: 115). Caught by the spirit of a broken relationship, a person mounts a ritual in order to dismiss the troublesome spirit and provide healing or purification. Without any need or justification for medical treatment for the emotions felt after a break up, people engage with the museum as a mode of self-help practice which is at the same time considered a creative process.

Certain stories clearly show the use of the museum as a fitting resting-place for the things that evoke contradictory emotions. They attest to the nature of the museum as a place which can resolve the complicated and conflicting emotional states of people derived from both a cherished presence and a long-awaited absence of emotionally charged objects in their lives. A person from Indiana, USA, says about a sweatshirt: '…So this has been in my closet and I can't wear it and it still means too much to me so I can't give it Goodwill. The MBR seems like a fitting place', while a person from Croatia says about her dress:

> …I wanted to give it to someone. But who would take a dress whose first dance ended in big ugly fall? Then I wanted to throw it away, put it next to the garbage container in the street, maybe someone would use it to wipe the dust or scrub the floors. But I couldn't. So I decided to donate it to the museum.

Figure 1 2 Museum interior

Creating a Museum Institution as a Place for Social Ritual

The collaborative art project entitled the Museum of Broken Relationships took the concept of the museum and turned it into an exhibit for the Salon exhibition. With each new donation the MBR exhibit constantly changed, in its content and, consequently, in its form. For one month, from 13 April to 12 May 2006, the donated artefacts with their stories were museum objects within an exhibit, a conceptual art work created by the people who took the opportunity for emotional cleansing offered by the project leaders.

The great interest aroused by the project took the Museum of Broken Relationships to another level. After visiting different cities around the world and receiving numerous artefacts, an art project appropriated physical features of conventional museum - a permanent exhibition space, museum shop and a café - and was transformed into a public institution, closely resembling a museum of modern art. Whether intentionally or unintentionally Grubišić and Vištica transposed an art exhibit into an art museum whose interior design and arrangement of museum objects is strongly reminiscent of the white cube (Fig. 1:2). Such a modernist exhibition space has been characterized by authors such as Doherty (1986), Branham (1994/95) or Serota (1996) as providing a means of concentration and contemplation, a space which supports intensive experience of each object and creates a transcendental mood associated with churches and temples.

The spatial arrangement of these de-contextualized objects displayed in isolation shows the power of a museum (especially art museum) to transform whatever is exhibited into 'and object of visual interest' (Alpers, 1991:25). Indeed, common artefacts such as a pendant, shoes or a dress thus seem to gain in the MBR a quality which goes beyond their physical characteristics. Not unlike Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades from the second decade of the twentieth century (Buchloh, 1997; Newman, 1999) they are formed by a creative gesture of extracting artefacts from their everyday contexts and intentionally transforming them to pieces charged with personal interpretation and significance. Originality is thus borne out of the combination of the artefact and the text. In other words, the very act of donation to the museum transforms their commonplaceness into an individual creative expression, provides them with an authorial imprint and an artistic aura even though there are no marks which specifically attest to authorship (there are no names of the donors). These depersonalized souvenirs of relationships and their endings exhibited in a public space represent segments of the universality of emotional states caused by a broken relationship no matter who or what the relationship protagonists were.

The displayed artefacts assume a role, given to them by such an institution, of witnesses to the events told by the people who donated them. They do not trigger emotional reaction to a painful historical event since they are ahistoric and therefore stripped of any possibly ideological meanings. They neither tell *a* story. Their story is the only story in this museum. They are acted out to the visitors by the texts in the form of narrative or suggestive individual accounts of what happened, and the artefacts in the form of visual manifestation

of broken relationships. In other words, instead of watching a play, visitors read the texts and observe the artefacts in order to reach their own interpretation of the story. The meaning of these objects is therefore determined by the way visitors experience the 'performance' of the objects. Meaning is created in the complex play of significations that occur between the material item and the verbal explanation. The text and the artefact form interdependent relationships which offer multiple ways of understanding the message that is conveyed. Objects such as the *French ID* (Fig. 1:3) will be read differently than, for example *A pioneer photographer* (Fig. 1:4) or *A side view mirror* whose text explains the events leading to the break up in more detail (Fig. 1:5).

Figure 1:3 A French ID, February 1980 – June 1998, Ljubljana, Slovenia. The only thing left of great love was citizenship

Figure 1:4 A pioneer photographer, 1996-2000, Berlin, Germany. This little pioneer is related to our story the same way the former Eastern Germany (DDR) was related to Western Germany (BDR).

Figure 1:5 A side-view mirror, 1983 – 1988, Zagreb, Croatia "One night his car was parked in front of the wrong house. He paid for that negligence with his side-view mirror. I was sorry afterwards since the car was not to blame. The wipers also got their share, but they were made of more solid material and thus stayed on the car. The following day, when the "Gentleman" came home, he told me a weird story about some hooligans who tore off his side-view mirror and bent the wipers. It was so funny that I was tempted to confess. Still, since he never told me where he had been that evening, neither did I. It was the beginning of the end of our relationship"

In addition to the stories told by the texts, information on the duration of the relationship and the resident country of the donor adds more material to the interpretation process which can sometimes help elucidate the meaning of a story or make interpretation more challenging for the visitor. Sometimes very exhaustive in details, at other times verbally sparse, these objects always represent the end, which is connoted by the name of the museum. The topic of loss defined by the name serves as a prism through which all objects are interpreted. There is also an undertone of sadness present in interpretation since people usually react to the generally sensitive topic of break-ups with certain dejection. Each story is experienced by visitors through reading, watching and interpreting. As in an art museum, by approaching objects separately displayed in the museum space, visitors enact their own ritual, during which their response will differ from object to object (Duncan, 1995). Whether the visitors will be touched, moved, shaken or appalled by the stories depends solely on them. A scale of emotional responses might sometimes depend on forms of the stories, since some of them are reduced to two lines and require considerable investment of imagination to fill the gap in the narrative and connect the verbal account to its material and visual part. Impressions are therefore contingent upon the capabilities of the visitors to imagine, upon their sensitivity or previous experiences.

The emotional experience of these tragic plays can be brought into connection with the effect dramatic tragedy has on audiences – that is, a catharsis of emotions of pity and fear (Daniels and Scully, 1992). In Holland's words:

> We work out through the text our own characteristic patterns of desire and adaptation. We interact with the work making it part of our own psychic economy and making ourselves part of the literary work-as we interpret (Holland, 1975: 816).

Each of the visitors to the Museum of Broken Relationships will therefore find in the composite objects the kind of thing they sympathize with or fear, something with which they can identify or from which to disassociate.

The stories have similarly been used for 'curatorial' intervention into the arrangement of objects within the 'white cube' into categories. Poetically expressed topics as headings under which certain groups of objects are placed stem from interpretations of the texts in combination to the artefacts, resulting in categories such as *Allure of Distance – Intimations of Proximity*, *Whims of Desire*, *Rage and Fury*, *Rites of Passage*, *Paradox of Home*, *Resonance of Grief* and the like. The nature of the museum objects composed of artefacts and texts introduce therefore a new sort of engagement with material culture by both the museum in relation to its classification, changing it from material, i.e. physical to emotional, and visitors in the way that they prompt in people exploration of themselves within themselves, not of the social, historical or cultural contexts or themselves in it.

The Museum of Broken Relationships might be said to be a museum setting that makes the donated personal ritualistic artefacts and exposes them to the public gaze in order to create a space designated for contemplation and an experience of *secular spirituality*.

Conclusion

The method of display which results from the interpretation of these composite objects raises the question of museum taxonomy which in this museum is not based on the physical characteristics and social use of artefacts, but rather emotional connections with them. Certain issues also emerge related to museums' institutional definition and of people's notions of them. If museums are seen as heritage institutions, can these artefacts in the MBR be called tangible heritage, and the stories about them intangible heritage? Does this museum need an educated curator, maybe a psychologist, who can classify objects emotionally? Does it need a curator at all since the collection depends on unpredictable influx of donations? Should this place be called museum at all and what should that name entail? Would people send their objects if the Museum of Broken Relationships changed its name into the Container of Broken Relationships, and would that renamed institution be arranged in the same way as it is now?

The importance of the materiality of the objects in the Museum of Broken Relationships lies in the fact that that they act as vessels of feelings, meaning and experience to both donors (creators of the museum objects) and visitors (audience of 'dramatic tragedies').

By giving material items to the museum, and by telling their personal stories about their break ups, the donors perform an individual ritual which is being communicated by the museum. On the other hand, visitors engaging in a ritualistic behaviour encouraged by the space of the museum, identify themselves in the stories through the displayed objects. This identification is made possible though the feelings created in the process of interpreting the objects i.e. observing the artefacts and reading the texts. The comparison of the visitors' experience with the experience of fictional dramatic tragedies, as well as the claim that the objects act as art works might imply a make-believe quality of the told stories. However, the motivation of any visit to this museum is not to question the honesty of the stories nor to engage in a relationship with artefacts which speak a scientific or academic truth about the world, but to have an emotional experience from individual accounts of a universal phenomenon - human relationships and their endings. Furthermore, this museum not only offers a possibility for individuals to display the artefacts which help them tell their stories without any curatorial intrusion into their texts, but, in effect, depends on them. All of this makes the Museum of Broken Relationships (MBR) a unique institution and a useful tool by which to examine the nature of museum-making.

Notes

1. More on the concept at: http://www.brokenships.com/skladiste/more_about_concept.pdf (12 January 2011)

2. The form which should be filled in and sent with an artifact can be found at: http://new.brokenships.com/en/join/send_your_exhibit (12 January 2011)

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Can Museums Heal? Can Museums Hoard?

LAZARUS GENT

Abstract

What is a 'therapeutic museum'? Using data obtained through participant observation of a group of academics, museum professionals, and community representatives, as they explore the relationship of healing and spirituality to material culture through visits to Northumberland Neolithic rock-art in the field and in museums located in North East England, this paper extends the concept of 'indigenous museologies' to describe 'hoarding' and 'collecting' as indigenous museologies of the UK. Following through the implications of two critical questions, 'Can museums heal?' and 'Can museums hoard?', a comparative analysis shows how each indigenous museology handles the issues of healing, spirituality, and religion in relation to rock-art and develops two models of the 'therapeutic museum'. The paper concludes by arguing that critical examination of the competing claims of these indigenous museologies could prompt the first major paradigm change in the history of British museums: a turn from collection to hoarding.

Keywords: collection, hoarding, 'indigenous museology', rock-art, 'therapeutic museum'.

Significance of the Therapeutic Museum

Recently, a case has been made about a new 'therapeutic' role for museums (Nightingale, 2009: 39-55). It is claimed therapeutic services could supplement traditional museum activities focused on education and recreation thus securing a new income stream during recession without requiring fundamental change in the theory or practice of museums – 'an opportunity waiting to happen' (Wood, 2008: 11). This suggestion is, at best, naïve. The advent of the 'therapeutic museum' is exciting not because it means business as usual but because it could prompt the first major paradigm change in the history of British museums. 'Can museums heal?' could be the most important question museologists have considered in centuries.

Fieldwork

I co-organised the 'Feels Good' Conference at the Great North Museum: Hancock, June 2010 with the aim of inspiring research on the therapeutic museum in North East England. The conference led to the formation of a research and development group comprised of academics, museum professionals, and community representatives. The group decided to open up the question of what a therapeutic museum could be by moving beyond the conventional medical model to explore the relationship between spirituality and healing and how museums might support this. Exploration began with a pilot study examining Northumberland's Neolithic rock-art (Fig. 2:1; Beckensall, 2001; Sharpe *et al*, 2008). The group is visiting rock-art in the field and in museums and analyzing the results. As an anthropologist, I track their activities through participant observation.

Figure2:1 Northumberland Neolithic Rock-Art

Description of Field Visits

Visits to rock-art in situ involve small groups of adults driving long distances to park at roadsides and then walk across country to the rock-art panels. Walking is often single-file along sheep tracks. Conversation whilst walking is minimal as participants give themselves time to 'slow down and take everything in'. On arrival at the rock-art site everyone removes and sets aside bags, coats, and footwear. Following an initial hesitation as people avoid approaching the sacred space of the rock-art, exploration of the rock-art and surrounding area begins, at first tentatively and then with a greater sense of ease but always quite slowly

and with an openness to the newness and strangeness of the experience. People do not know what is expected of them and have 'to make it up as they go along'. The average visit at each rock-art site lasts two hours (plus travelling time). Some of the visitors walk barefoot and feel the textures of the rock-art and surrounding terrain through their feet (Fig. 2:2). They climb on the rock-art (Fig. 2:3), sit on it, lie down on it, place cheek against the stone, trace the contours of the rock and the grooves of the rock-art with their toes and fingers. As the visit progresses people sit scattered on the rock, relaxed, chatting quietly. Some curl up and appear to fall asleep in the sun. Some pray in the presence of the rock-art: 'It feels good to pray out of doors; where there is no ceiling, no roof, between myself and God [...] that was so special for me.'

Figure 2:2 Barefoot at the Roughting Linn Rock-Art Site

Figure 2:3 Communing With Rock-Art

During visits, any archaeologists on site occasionally receive questions about the prehistory of the rock-art but the knowledge they offer is not privileged, it is just one more aspect of the day, informally integrated with the rest. In a visit to a wooded site, an archaeologist takes a brush from her backpack and explains how she would use it to clear debris from the surface of the rock-art as preparation for analysis. Another member of the group borrows the brush. The rest of the group spontaneously form a circle and stand around to watch her clear pine needles from the rock-art with gentle strokes (Fig. 4). The woods are very still, the light is very green. Everyone is very calm; all seem deeply contented. It is a magical moment:

> 'Watching you brush the rock was good. […] It was as if you were giving something back to the rock – like cherishing it. I felt it was right to say thank you for the wonderful day we had had. I am glad you did that and I think you did that perfectly. It sort of captured the day for me.'

At a later date, when discussing these field visits, participants said their visits had been very worthwhile in many different ways. Asked to identify what was special about field visits, the group mentioned that they are permissive; although guided to the sites by experts who know how to find the rock-art these experts do not tell visitors how to behave when at the sites. Rather they are explicitly told 'this is your time to do as you please' and that 'experts are here to answer questions if you have any but will not volunteer information until asked' and that 'you control what happens here'. Visits take time and effort which sounds like a disadvantage but instead this allowed people to slow down to the point that they feel unburdened, totally relaxed, and able to reflect. They had 'time out' away from their routine; were able to do something physical rather than cerebral; had the novel experience of visiting rock-art (new to most of the group); could enjoy being in the company of others going through something similar; and could make new friendships. The visits helped people feel connected, cherished, nurtured, attached (Bowlby, 1969) both with respect to human others (e.g. the rest of the group, the 'ancestors' who made the rock-art) and to non-human others (e.g. the rock-art, the landscape, the sky, the weather, Nature, God). Visits left people feeling inspired, energised and empowered. The positive effects of visits lingered as pleasant memories. For some, rock-art figured in dreams. A few reported that they made life-changing decisions (e.g. to retire or to change jobs) during the rock-art visits. Some recorded their experiences in poetry and art.

Reflecting on their transformative experiences, the group made no distinction between therapeutic and spiritual effects. People felt 'changed' but did not feel any particular need to analyse this further. This was true whether the individual had religious beliefs or not. It may be that distinction between therapeutics, spirituality, and religion is quite meaningless in this context. However, the group did note that transformations were more intense (e.g. people did not just consider changing jobs but actually changed jobs) when their visits

involved haptic experiences (e.g. walking barefoot at rock-art sites) or involved rituals (both pre-existing rituals adapted on site e.g. praying at the sites and new rituals spontaneously created on site e.g. stroking the rock-art) or were materialised into 'tangible memories' which could be hoarded (e.g. when found objects or photographs were taken home from visits).

Figure 2:4 Improvised Rituals at Rock-Art Sites

Analysis: Hoarding Museology

Participants do not distinguish therapeutic from spiritual or religious transformations. I conclude that these essentialist categories are meaningless in the context of field visits. This does not plunge us into 'ontological havoc' (Gell, 1998, 22) but it does require us to find a new philosophical framework for our analysis. Possible alternatives are not hard to find if we follow the ethnographic data. What emerges in conversation with the group is a desire to manage their rock-art field visits in order to avoid 'spoiling' them. Implicit in this delicacy of approach may be the feeling that rock-art field visits are a gracious 'gift', which calls for equally gracious return (Mauss, 1967 [1925]: 1). Interpreting the group's transformative field visits in terms of gifts and exchanges allows us to contextualise their experiences in the ethnographic literature and thus come to a possible philosophical framework for analysis.

One locus of exchange is in the buffeting of the wind at exposed rock-art sites. The wind 'blows through' people and 'gets inside their heads'. Wind can be an 'elemental force' but as the body becomes more 'permeable', so the distinction between person and wind dissolves. As in aboriginal cultures (Rose, 1992) or Khoisan cultures (Low, 2007), at rock-art

sites the wind is like a person and people are like the wind. Something similar happens with the touch of bare foot on rock. The barefoot body is more 'permeable' than the shod body and an exchange between barefoot visitor and rock-art makes rock-art like a person and people like rock-art. The gift of a 'permeable body' is an anonymous gift hence the recipients cannot say whether it is a therapeutic, spiritual, or religious gift. However, we can say that the gift shifts the focus of analysis from 'being' to 'becoming'. This phenomenology has been modelled in the literature e.g. becoming a 'body-without-organs' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 165-184), 'bodily-living-in-the-world' (Carrette and King, 1998: 141), 'wayfaring' (Ingold, 2007: 89), on foot and amidst the 'weather-world' (Ingold, 2010: S136) and it has inspired new accounts of 'humanity' e.g. the hybridity of the 'cyborg' (Haraway, 1991: 180), the 'messy heterogeneity of being-in-the-world' which is the 'more-than-human' (Whatmore, 2002: 147) or the contingency of the 'post/human' (Graham, 2002: 36-7). Academic modelling projects its alternative humanities into the utopias of 'how it might be' in some imagined past or future. Field visits suggest people can attain such alterity in the 'here and now' of the 'anonymous gift' at rock-art sites.

My research is on-going and the task of determining which ethnographic comparisons or theoretical constructs will best elucidate what happens during field visits to rock-art remains unfinished. What we can say is that the field visit evidence means we have to reconsider the question 'Can museums heal?' We can now see that the question is too narrowly defined. We cannot talk about 'therapeutics' in the field visit context because field visits involve a very different phenomenology and ontology. In place of essentially defined 'healing' (or 'spirituality' or 'religion') what field visits draw attention to is becoming, mutability, transformation, exchange, and gifting. During field visits, 'others' (e.g. wind or rock-art) are experienced as actants (Law & Hassard, 1999), which have agency, and not as passive objects existing merely to be appropriated (collected) by people for their own ends (Belk, 2001; Elsner & Cardinal, 1994). This experience precludes that oppression of the other under the objectifying gaze of the *flaneur*, which is rightly denounced by Feminist critics (Hein, 2008: 34). It precludes that appropriation of the other by a self-serving philosophical 'comprehension', which decides, like Heidegger, that a stone (or rock-art) is 'without world' while man is 'world-forming' (Derrida, 1989: 12). In brief, interacting with others as respected actants precludes the fundamental chauvinism, which characterises collection and leads instead to a relationship of hoarding (or treasuring) of valued encounters. Thus what field visits can teach us, even at this early stage, is that what we need to ask of museums is not only can they heal but also if they can support the exchange of 'anonymous gifts' which bring a new embodiment and a new humanity; if they can offer transformative encounters with actants not objects; in brief, 'Can museums hoard?'

Figure 2:5 Rock-Art In A Museum Gallery

Figure 2:6 Rock-Art In A Museum Gallery

Description of Museum Visits

The same group made visits to rock-art displayed in local museums (Figs. 2:5 and 2:6). Visits to museums involve walking a few paces from the car park or public transport drop off points to the museum doors. Conversation is general. Museums are entered through a reception area and shop. Members of the group stop to read the various notices including the scale of charges for admission and tables of opening times and to collect printed guides. They pay entrance fees if necessary. They ignore lockers and retain their outdoor clothing and bags. Progress is along sign-posted corridors, which constrain choice of movement. They mingle with the other visitors. A visit during school holidays finds galleries very busy with many excited children running around. The noise is deafening and the galleries are crowded. No one lingers anywhere for more than a few minutes. At the rock-art gallery the members of the group look at the rock-art displays. On average they gaze at each rock-art panel for about five seconds and spend twenty seconds reading each of the printed information panels. One museum provides a touch-screen interpretive panel and typically individual members of the group interacted with the panel for three minutes. When two or more people share the interactive screen they linger a little longer, approximately four-and-a-half minutes. No one attempts to touch the rock-art. When this is remarked upon, one person briefly strokes one of the rock-art exhibits with a finger tip (Fig. 2:7). She remarks, 'I feel I must do this'. Another person remarks, 'I feel nothing'. No one attempts to pray. The group visits the toilets, cafés, and shops provided in each museum they visit. They spend most of their time in the café and other non-gallery areas of the museum. In the cafés, members of the group remove outer clothing and put down bags. They relax, sharing a meal or drinks. Conversation is general. One museum has a play area for children in a corner of the café and members of the group dress up and play briefly (Fig. 2:8). The same café has a display, which invites visitor to try different smells from the past. The group tries out the smells, one of which is particularly foul, and there is laughter, general banter and animation around this display. As they leave members of the group handle the items for sale in the museum shops, briefly play with them, but make no purchases and leave empty-handed.

Figure 2:7 Touching Rock-Art In A Museum Gallery

Figure 2:8 Playing In A Museum Cafe

Talking over the museum visits, members of the group reported no particularly significant response to the rock-art displays in museums. The visits were not that memorable; merely mildly pleasant experiences; an opportunity to socialise with friends and any place one could sit down and share a meal could do for that purpose. No one described the museum visits as healing, spiritually significant, inspiring or empowering or kept any mementos of the visits. The museum visits did not give rise to dreams. Nor did anyone report any significant life changes resulting from visiting rock-art in museums: 'I can honestly say I have never learned anything from visiting a museum'.

Asked to account for this outcome, members of the group suggested that museum visits did not allow as much break with routine as a field visit. Museums were bland and predictable and thus just perpetuated routine. Participants attributed blandness to the lack of direct contact with the rock-art and thus the absence of a flood of sensory (or psychologically or spiritually significant) experiences in association with the rock-art. Although most of the rock-art was not behind glass in any of the museums visited and might have been touched, few members of the group felt able to touch it. Asked how museums inhibited their behaviour the group suggested that it was partly due to their own belief that touching is not allowed in museums. A belief reinforced by occasional notices, which literally asked people not to touch exhibits, and by a pervasive feeling that everything had its own invisible 'Do Not Touch' notice. This inhibition did not apply in the museum shops and cafés where everything on display was handled freely including expensive, breakable items on display in glass cases and therefore potentially indistinguishable from many of the museum exhibits in nearby galleries. The few sensory experiences that were recalled were mostly remembered because they were generally unpleasant (e.g. the deafening noise in crowded museums visited during school holidays; the foul smell in the 'smells of the past' display). These memorable sensory experiences were either all pervasive (e.g. 'noise pollution') or 'engineered' events (e.g. 'smells of the past') that manipulated and produced responses on cue. As such, the experience of these sensory stimuli was irritating or mildly amusing but pointless: 'A bad smell is a bad smell – so what? It's just a gimmick'.

All members of the group spent the majority of their time in the rock-art galleries reading notices and interacting with touch-screen panels. When asked what they could recall about the content of the notices they read, all members of the group reported, with amusement, that they could recall nothing. Asked about the touch-screen panels, everyone remembered using them, and one person said that she thought them a 'good idea for children' because this familiar technology would provide a bridge to engage with the less familiar world of rock-art. However, when questioned, she could not recall any content from the panels except that it offered an opportunity to select an image of rock-art that could be emailed home. Another member of the group resented the touch-screen panels and notices because they absorbed the visitor's attention and thus formed a barrier between the visitor and the rock-art: 'It's ooh! and it's aah! but it means bugger all really'.

Analysis: Collecting Museology

Although the group reported museum visits as bland and unremarkable, my observations suggest that all museum visits involve significant transformations out of the awareness of visitors. Museums claim to provide information and educate visitors. They do so by providing reading materials. Museums induce visitors to read in various ways: by continuously channelling their movements and directing their attention with architecture, signs, and spotlights towards reading large amounts of redundant information. Thus museums exert minute control over visitors. Following this direction, visitors dutifully read everything put forth. However, they retain little of what they read. Thus museums appear to fail in their primary purpose. But is reading only about informing visitors?

Reading isolates visitors since for most people reading occurs 'inside their own heads' (Ong, 2002 [1982], 129). Whilst isolated by reading, meaningless sensory stimuli (e.g. sound-effects leaking from other galleries; crowd noises amplified by museum acoustics etc) bombard visitors and induce further dissociation. Galleries thus put a wedge between dissociated reader and the material world including their own bodies and the collected objects on display. During every museum visit the group retained their outdoors clothing and bags (even when lockers were available for hire). Dragging around useless garments, they appeared burdened by materiality. Although reporting no awareness of any transformations occurring in 'bland' galleries, they appeared subconsciously aware of, and acting out symbolically (by hauling around useless clothing made of dead material), their induced dissociations and almost psychotic experiences of alienation from their own bodies and the material world. On the basis of this evidence, it appears museums harm their visitors.

By becoming dissociated and dutifully fulfilling the 'emotion work' (Hochschild, 1983: 7) of visiting galleries, visitors have earned compensation. Museum cafés and shops offer relaxation and reward. The group spends most of their visiting time in museum cafés and shops. There, other than menus and price tags, they read little; they casually doff outdoor

clothes and bags (unconsciously symbolising that embodiment no longer burdens them); have no inhibition about touching things; indulge their sensuality by shopping or share coffee or a meal. Social activities organised around consumption bring the group back to a comfortable embodiment integrated in a pleasing material world; back to 'normality'. Just being in the shop or café reverses the dissociation experienced in the galleries. On the basis of this evidence, museums apparently heal their visitors.

To understand why museums might harm or heal their visitors we need to review their history. We can trace the history of UK museums back to the 'theatre of state' of the Stuart court. During elaborate court ballets, the enthroned monarch turned a Godlike gaze upon dancers stepping out the limits of his kingdom. Their dancing made manifest both the lay of the land and the ordering of the people within it into stable hierarchies. The Crown as the Vicar of God and the subjects of the Crown as the people of God were made manifest and therefore most real by the artifice of sacred theatre (Olwig, 2002: 31). In time, this sacred theatre, becoming gradually less explicit as it became less grand, was incorporated into the architecture of the aristocratic 'stately home' in its 'landscape' and later of the gentrified 'town house' and 'garden' (Olwig, 2002: 40). Both were settings for the 'cabinet of curios', which used material objects in place of dancers to set out the ordered hierarchy of a stable world. The cabinet of curios soon became the museum (Hein, 2007; Genoways & Andrei, 2008). Contemporary British museums remain preoccupied with collections of 'objects'. These are the material indices of 'Reason', a knowing divorced from faith. While overtly secular, a divinity underpins the authority of Reason, specifically the 'crossed out God' of modernity (Latour, 1993: 13). Similarly, 'cabinets' remain essential to contemporary museums. These are not just items of specialised furniture but the stage settings for an overtly secular and covertly sacred theatre whereby museums construct an experience of time and space that links the reality of the crossed out God to that of the universe, the nation state, and the subject, and makes them co-confirming (Olwig, 2002: 22).

When visitors enter a museum, they may expect a display of curios in cabinets and expect to read the labels in order to come to a rational understanding of the exhibits. What also (unconsciously) occurs is that the sacred theatre of the museum entrances and thus brings the visitor into an encounter with the crossed out God. 'Transportation' is Ingold's term for a form of travel by which the traveller moves from location to location (e.g. from airport to airport as marked on a map) and in between such locations is treated as 'in transit' and thus in some sort of supplementary space and time off the map or, effectively, 'nowhere at all' (Ingold, 2007: 84). A museum visit is a form of transportation; the visitor moves from display case to display case and between times is in the 'nowhere' of dissociation which we now realise is also the sacred space of communion with the crossed out God. According to Ingold, transportation is the strategy of choice for colonising territory (Ingold, 2007). We could argue that the transports experienced during gallery visits serve to colonise the psyches of museum visitors. Whatever the specific objects set forth in museum cabinets, galleries, and temporary exhibitions for the 'edu-tainment' of the public (e.g. dinosaurs,

Egyptian mummies, counterfeit coins, the inventions of Da Vinci, or Halloween ghosts) the more significant learning inculcated in visitors by this sacred theatre is how to be a 'subject' in both a universal and specifically British sense of the term. Subjectivity (being human) and identity (being British) form in the museum and these are, at root, a (disavowed) religious formation.

British museums do not advertise their hidden agenda to their publics; secrecy is the key to their power. Museums exercise the 'discipline and control' predicted for such institutions by Foucault while remaining unaccountable (Foucault, 1977 [1975]). They achieve unaccountability through dissimulation. Although museums appear secularised, they continue to invoke the divine as a 'crossed out' and thus unquestionable divinity. The religious foundations of the sacred theatre of the museum are hidden and, thus, more powerful than the religious foundations of the sacred theatre of the early modern court. This covert religious foundation allows the apparently secular nation state to be more powerful (more psychologically penetrating) and enduring than the Stuart monarchy.

Thus far we have focused on understanding the harm that occurs in museums. What of the healing that takes place? In museum shops and cafés, souvenirs or snacks (unlike museum exhibits) can be seen, heard, touched, smelt, eaten, trashed, played with, or taken home – for a price. Shopping allows museum visitors to buy their way back into 'normality'. If healing is about returning to normality, shopping is therapeutic. It is our strongest evidence of museums' capacity to heal – although it may be they can only heal the injuries they inflict. Meanwhile, one might argue, as Miller does, that shopping is a form of sacrifice and thus should be viewed as a form of religious activity (Miller, 1998). Shopping in museums is healing achieved through a sacrifice of substitution (Lienhardt, 1961) where the sacrificial victims, the commodities bought and consumed by visitors, take on that part of the burden of transportation and colonization, which visitors/shoppers wish to evade. Visitors/shoppers do not fully evade the subjectivity constructed in museums, they simply pass the most harmful effects of that subjectivity on to commodities, and the result is a psychologically more endurable and thus more sustainable 'normality'.

By constructing normality and, in every sense of the term, requiring visitors to buy into it, museums ensure that visitors never really leave the museum. The only alternative to the 'routine' normality of the museum is the 'nowhere' of divine communion (or madness) and museums define even that alterity. Foucault seems to allude to something like this when he describes museums as totalities or 'heterotopias' (Foucault, 1986). By injuring their visitors, museums ensure they must shop for relief and if they must shop then they must sacrifice. The sacrifice of shopping is a pervasive (overtly secular, covertly religious) ritual that ensures the binding together of personal subjectivity, nation state, and the economy in a commoditised normality. Indeed, there is no clear line of demarcation that allows us to distinguish museum from subjectivity or from nation state or economy. By the same token we cannot readily distinguish reading, theatre, therapeutics, shopping, religion, politics,

nationality, or identity. Within the universal time and space of the museum these are all inextricably intertwined and mutually supportive.

When discussing field visits, the question was posed 'Can museums hoard?' Hoarding, you will recall, is associated with the embodiment and humanity that are anonymously gifted when encountering (non-human) others as actants. This gifting is a transformation, which occurs in awareness and thus can be owned by the recipient (even if they remain somewhat mystified by their experiences) and thus become the basis of avowed 'identity' and autonomous actions ('making decisions'). This is a radically different experience compared with unconscious psychic colonisation by a crossed out God which imposes on museum visitors in ways they are hardly aware of, still less able to consent to, or take as their own lost as these are in 'blandness' and 'routine'. Museums impose their normalisation on humans and non-humans, harming health, and denying autonomy. This normalisation/colonisation is fundamentally religious in conception and thus beyond moral challenge (e.g. in terms of visitors' rights). However, museums could be brought to account via a theological challenge.

It is not unusual to claim that museums as places of knowing are 'reticent about considering the religious life' (Goa, 2000: 52) and tracing this to the 'pax moderna' and its division of knowledge and faith (Latour, 1993) but the reality seems to be that museums are very interested in religion and very adept at dissimulating their interest. An unfortunate consequence of this evasion of accountability is that the theological foundations of museology remain largely unchallenged. However, they are not unchallengeable. The foundation of museum-normality appears to be a theology in which divine encounter is a harmful psychic colonisation and thus something to evade. The main technique of evasion is the sacrifice of non-human others, something which strips them of their capacity to be autonomous actants. Sacrifice occurs in the galleries (where non-humans are denied autonomy and sacrificially reduced to a collection – a ritual which fuels transport and psychic colonisation by the crossed out God) and in shopping (where non-humans are denied autonomy and sacrificially reduced to commodities – a ritual which limits the harmful impact of transport and psychic colonisation on people by sending non-humans into that 'nowhere' in their stead). However, the substitution is not total. Human beings continue to experience the burden of transport, colonisation, and the resulting normality; sacrifice just makes normality bearable and therefore more enduring. In the sacred economy of substitution-sacrifice, if some part of being human is not substituted and thus remains victimised by normality (i.e. is itself sacrificed to the crossed out God) then to that extent non-human others will retain some residual trace of their autonomy and might therefore be encountered as actants in a museum. Such encounter could be a thread to unravel the totalising worldview of collecting-museums. When substitution-sacrifice fails, 'anonymous gifting' can take the place of 'psychic colonisation'; exposing the theological basis of collection; challenging collection's moral order; allowing a very different 'hoarding

worldview' to transform experience of time, space, universe, nation state, reading, theatre, therapeutics, shopping, religion, politics, nationality, identity and so on.

Conclusion: Drawing on Indigenous Museology to Prompt Paradigm Shift

Museologists have engaged with fundamentally different approaches to material culture, with so-called 'indigenous museologies', but only in a Third World post-colonial context where 'indigenous museology' means the non-Western culture of local populations (Kreps, 2008: 26). By implication there is no 'indigenous museology' in Western countries. Professional, academic, collecting museology supposedly speaks for all. This is untenable. The ethnographic evidence suggests there are indigenous museologies in the UK. I have used my field data to outline a hoarding and a collecting museology and to describe their different relationships to therapeutics, spirituality, religion, and 'material things'.

Guiding my analysis were the questions Can museums heal? Can museums hoard? They allowed me to give an account of British museums, which, in its complexities and ramifications, may surprise some readers. However, I trust my 'articulation of a theory appropriate to the contemporary museum' might 'enable it to fulfil a moral function that some critics find currently lacking' (Hein, 2007: 31) and so find a welcome, at least with those critics.

Clearly, more than museology is affected by this enquiry. Hoarding and collection have relationships to complex worldviews, which means that any investigation of hoarding or collection will change our understanding of all related terms – a surprisingly broad range of terms. The promise of a paradigm shift in museology is that it will help promote paradigm shift in many other disciplines, from anthropology to therapeutics via theology. I think we should welcome that.

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Observing the Less Visible: Alice takes on Astronomy

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Abstract

"Curiouser and curiouser!" Cried Alice (she was so much surprised, that for the moment she quite forgot how to speak good English). "Now I'm opening out like the largest telescope that ever was! …."

In the same way as Alice considered new ways of putting shoes and socks on her feet when she telescoped to a great height in Wonderland, the Carte du Ciel and Astrographic Catalogue had to overcome technological and distance obstacles by establishing new communication imperatives for observatories around the globe. In order to do this, normative techniques and technologies were established to control how the work was done from Paris at the centre. Part of this new methodology was the employment of a workforce of women. Through Latour's theoretical framework, this paper makes visible the women who were employed to measure the photographic plates and record the positions of hundreds of thousands of stars for each observatory in Australia. It argues for a re-interpretation of the history of astronomy, re-inserting women back into the process of this science through technology, interiors, sites and virtual interfaces using Sydney Observatory as a case study. Like the Cheshire cat, the material culture can reveal new findings when you least expect.

Keywords: astronomy, gender, heritage, Latour, observatory, women.

While Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, better known and referred to by his pseudonym, Lewis Carroll, was writing Alice in Wonderland in the 1860s there was a revolution occurring in the sky. New discoveries of nebulae and comets were being viewed through ever larger Looking Glasses and a young keen astronomer, Reverend Robert Main, was appointed to Radcliffe Observatory at Oxford. This is where Carroll was tutoring mathematics, and in 1863 Main published a popular book for teaching astronomy to University students which included ninety one mathematical problems. Perhaps this is why Alice cried as her head touched the

ceiling: "Curiouser and curiouser, now I'm opening out like the largest telescope that ever was! ...."[1], and then, just like evidence of women's participation in astronomy, the white rabbit scampered away as elusive as ever.

This paper was presented at Leicester University's Museum Studies Conference 'Curiouser and Curiouser: challenging conventions and celebrating the unusual'. It is about astrometry, a term for measuring the positions of stars, and photography of the night sky is one way of performing this. Developments in this science shifted the line between imagination and reality and a project which had two outcomes, the Carte du Ciel (or 'Chart of the Sky') and an Astrographic Catalogue, was a wondrous endeavour to map the stars of the entire celestial globe. In the same way as Alice's great height forced her to consider new ways of putting shoes and socks on her feet when she telescoped in Wonderland, the Carte du Ciel and Astrographic Catalogue forced observatories to establish new ways of working.

The stars of the Southern Hemisphere were mainly a mystery to the scientific world well into the 19th Century. In 1788 a young Eora woman, Patyegarang, befriended the First Fleet Astronomer Lieutenant William Dawes. While there is no official record of her observing the night sky, it is hard to imagine that there was no exchange of that nature as Patyegarang and Dawes had detailed and documented exchanges about language and customs in Dawes's makeshift observatory on the place we now call 'Dawes Point' (Nathan, 2009). According to Indigenous Curator James Wilson Miller[2] and as evidenced by Patyegarang's specific language for the Sun, the Moon and the Magellanic clouds listed in Dawes's notebook, Patyegarang, both curious and demanding, had indeed observed the sky. Over two centuries later Australians are finally acknowledging that Indigenous people had a detailed and useful knowledge of the land and sky (Hamacher: 2011) well before it was mapped by astronomers.

The evidence about Patyegarang and Dawes and the nature of the Indigenous language of the Sydney Region had been held in a university and a research centre in London since 1835. Dawes's notebook came to the attention of researchers when the title was published in 1972 in a listing of manuscripts relating to Australia. However, it is only since 2008 that the existence of Patyegarang has been more widely known. This story is of immense importance to understanding the cultural history of the original inhabitants of Sydney and their interaction with the British colonisers during the First Settlement. The fact that it had lain undisturbed for so long ignited my curiosity to search primary sources for a more detailed understanding of what occurred in Australian observatories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

My thesis, titled Observing the less Visible, analyses the rhetoric of the history of one of the greatest star maps and catalogues ever attempted. It examines the participation of Australian observatories from a social and cultural perspective drawing on primary sources and critically analyses existing research. The power of selection, of inclusion or exclusion, has determined how the Carte du Ciel and Astrographic Catalogue have been interpreted

over the past century. This paper discusses the participation of women, and, by referring to Bruno Latour's Centres of Calculation and Accumulation theory, briefly touches on the colonial perspective.

Figure 3:1 Participants in the Carte du Ciel and Astrographic Catalogue meeting held in Paris, 1887. Photographer: Nadar. Source: http://www.obs-mip.fr/patrimoine/newpage/expogb.htm, (Accessed 20/03/11).

At a meeting of astronomers from observatories around the globe in Paris in 1887, a commitment was made to one of the first truly global projects (Figure 3:1). Under the direction of Paris astronomer, Admiral Mouchez, the Carte du Ciel was to be a photographic chart of the entire sky with stars down to a scale 14 of brightness measurement (magnitude), the larger the number, the fainter the star. At the same time an Astrographic Catalogue composed of stars as faint as a magnitude of 11 was to be produced (Hearnshaw, 1996: 139, Haynes, 1996:62). These stars were not able to be seen with the naked eye, and the higher magnitudes would not have been visible through most telescopes. The new technology was to revolutionise astronomy. As quoted from the nineteenth century science historian William Seaton:

> 'By applying a sensitive photographic plate to the telescope instead of the human eye, we have obtained photographs of comets, stars, and nebulae which it was utterly impossible for the eye to see through the telescope.... [T]he cumulative effects of many hours' exposure reveal depths in our universe undreamed of before.' (Hirschfield, 2004: 40)

Initially eighteen observatories enthusiastically agreed to participate in the Carte du Ciel and Astrographic Catalogue, including Melbourne and Sydney, two well-established colonial observatories located in eastern Australia. In 1900, after approval by the Astronomer Royal at Greenwich, Perth Observatory in Western Australia undertook the section previously

designated to Rio de Janiero. The Southern Hemisphere had the largest sector of sky which included the star-rich Milky Way.

The technique of the Carte du Ciel, and indeed every other map of the sky that has come before and after, is to follow in the tradition of Western mapmaking. Bruno Latour, a contemporary French anthropologist who specialises in analysing scientists and the process of science, has devised models that describe scientists at work. His Centre of Calculation model (Latour, 1987: 213-215) explains how maps have power, as quoted from Turnbull's book Maps are Territories:

> 'Maps, like theories, have power in virtue of introducing modes of manipulation and control that are not possible without them. They become evidence of reality in themselves and can only be challenged through the production of other maps or theories' (Turnbull, 1989: 54).

The terminology, methods and typologies used to mediate the chart of the sky and catalogue could only be produced and understood by those with specialised knowledge. Latour proposed that through specialised knowledge networks a small group of astronomers were able to muster considerable resources, build new buildings, commission new instruments and establish new ways of working in most parts of the globe. Furthermore, astronomers were very good at performing at a distance with precision, regularity and in tabulated form (Turnbull, 1989: 219-221), hence able to maintain an accumulative cycle described by Latour as one of the normative characteristics of modern science (Latour, 1987: 215-223). The project's intention was to enable future astronomers to understand the movement of stars by comparing epochs, thus creating an accumulative cycle of grand proportions. The success of the individual Observatory which participated in the Carte du Ciel was determined by its ability to be part of that network, sending back accurately tabulated results that were standardised. Based on Latour's rationale, it can be argued that one of the primary reasons the Carte du Ciel and, to a lesser extent the Astrographic catalogue, lost support from the wider professional astronomy community is that the accumulation cycle was slow and incomplete. For the area of the sky photographed by the Australian observatories the Carte du Ciel was never completed.

It will come as no surprise that, although Paris was the determined Centre of Calculation, the Colonial Observatories were subjected to the authority of their London Agent's relationship with the Astronomer Royal in Greenwich. Nonetheless the Government Astronomer for Sydney Observatory, Henry Chamberlain Russell, a great enthusiast for the Carte du Ciel, skirted the British Colonial office in London, through which all correspondence was meant to pass, and conversed directly with Admiral Mouchez in Paris[3]. Other astronomers also understood that the Carte du Ciel may not fit with colonial imperatives, due to the local governments demonstrating little interest in supporting scientific research that was not of immediate and obvious benefit to the colony. The Australian Observatories were threatened with closure several times, only to be saved by direct intervention from the

highest ranks of British Astronomy and the Carte du Ciel network. David Gill, the astronomer for Cape Town Observatory and one of the chief instigators of the Carte du Ciel project, returned to Britain to become President of the Royal Astronomical Society. In 1908 Gill advised Baillaud, Director of Paris Observatory, that when seeking the attendance of at least one Australian astronomer at a meeting:

> '…stress should be laid upon the international scientific importance of this co-operation of the Australian observatories….Colonial ministers, as a rule, are quite ignorant of science, but they are also very easily offended on the reverse. A tactfully written letter from the President of the International Committee would have great weight with them.' (Chinicci, 1999: 126)

Mouchez proposed that glass plates for the Astrographic Catalogue be measured through the "establishment of a bureau" in Paris (Wood, 1958: 16, Bigg, 2000: 94). This did not eventuate and each observatory was charged with the responsibility to measure its own glass plate negatives. The measurement work in Australia was predominantly undertaken by women.

Women have been involved in astronomy in every country and every era, however, they are hard to find. In Britain and North America in the 1980's and 90's there was a movement to 'right the record' and include women in the history of science (Larsen, 2009). Papers highlighted the barriers and prejudice women faced (Welther, 1982; Benjamin, 1991; Wertheim, 1995; Oreskes, 1996; Kidwell, 1999). These barriers included limited access to education, restricted membership of Astronomy Associations and the patriarchal nature of science (Benjamin, 1991). Research into astronomy in Britain in the nineteenth Century (Kidwell, 1999) revealed that women were likely to be assisting a male relative, who was the observer, by notating the finds. They were unmarried and unlikely to have been acknowledged or paid to do the work[4]. In North America, as Kristine Larsen's aptly titled 'A Woman's Place is in the Dome' paper explains, astronomy was strictly 'genderised' in its structure and Observatory buildings had to be 'feminised' to accommodate women. This was mirrored in Australia where women were even more discouraged from entering the more heroic aspects of observational astronomy; however, the instruments and buildings were designed to accommodate their needs.

In 1893 Williamina Fleming was employed at Harvard College Observatory to work on their Astrographic catalogue. She proposed that:

> 'Photography as applied to astronomy is one of the greatest advances which has been made in this the oldest of sciences, and the same advance has opened up a comparatively extensive field for women's work in this department.' (Bigg, 2000:97)[5]

In North America there were increased opportunities for women to gain education, work in research and have their discoveries acknowledged, especially at Harvard College

Observatory under Edward Pickering's directorship (Welther, 1982: 94). However, this was not the case in the Pacific, Europe and Britain, where the division of labour was about maintaining boundaries between the genders. The Observatory was a male space, a private sphere, most-often also the abode of the astronomer. At night it was necessarily dark and, for unaccompanied women, considered taboo.

The Carte du Ciel has been compared by Bigg to the industrialisation of the artisan's craft through the factory production line. After it was clear that Paris would not measure and reduce all the glass plate negatives, Melbourne and Sydney combined forces and employed women for the time-consuming role of measuring the glass plates and cataloguing the results (Russell, 1902). Australia's Perth Observatory astronomer employed two local women and also, after much correspondence, commissioned Edinburgh Observatory Director, Frank Dyson, to employ two local Scots women for measurement of some of the Perth plates. One Scot, Miss S. Falconer, measured the glass plates from 1909 until 1916 when she left to volunteer in the War effort in France, leaving no other record of her career. These plates were originally shipped from England, exposed in Perth Observatory through the Star Camera, shipped back across the ocean to Edinburgh for measuring and then back to Australia for compiling (Kidwell, 1999:231)[6].

Figure 3:2 A measurer at Melbourne Observatory employed for the Astrographic Catalogue c1902.
Source: Museum Victoria.

In 1898 six women were employed at Melbourne Observatory. In 1902 Australia's new Commonwealth Parliament granted women the vote and the right to be elected. In the same year the number of women employed in Melbourne Observatory increased to eleven (Figure 3:2), and they were noted as curiosities of the time in the women's section of the Brisbane Courier. They were paid £40 a year to work a 43 hour week on the Sydney and Melbourne plates, a salary, according to the editor, no man would agree to (Anon., 1902)[7]. The city of Brisbane, capital of the State of Queensland, was not involved in the Carte du Ciel and Astrographic catalogue and this article is possibly written as a warning to the women of Queensland, to be wary of the dangers of entering such a workforce. By 1902 in New South Wales 97% of the population was either born locally or emigrated from Britain or one of its dominions. The proportion of females had increased to almost that of males, however,

there had been a recent decline in the number of marriages and a slight increase in the age at which women were marrying. Men had a significantly higher mortality rate than women and there had been a number of economic depressions, resulting in a decline in wages. Over the previous twenty years literacy for both sexes had improved remarkably due to a professionalised public education system. From the statistics there would have been a number of school educated, unmarried women who were looking for work to support themselves in their twenties, and also a number of widowed women who needed an income. These factors, plus the new normative standard for women to be employed for measuring in observatories, would have influenced the decisions made by the Government Astronomers (Hall, 1905: 544-714). Only a very small number of the population had received University education, and of those only 13% were women. There was little opportunity for employment in astronomy and even less for a woman to be employed as an astronomer.

By 1912 measuring the Sydney plates was relocated from Melbourne to Sydney Observatory (Wood, 1971: 7). Again a major change occurred in the layout of the Observatory to accommodate the new female workforce and equipment. An extension was built with large windows upstairs where the women worked, so they could view their glass plates using natural light, while the astronomer and observers worked downstairs. A ladies' flush toilet and 'tea room' were installed on the first floor of Sydney Observatory. Now the only evidence of these facilities in the public Observatory spaces is a fan inside a cupboard. The extension was demolished as part of the 1980s restoration of the site to how it appeared in the 1880s.

In their pictorial history of Observatory Hill curators Nick Lomb and Charles Pickett (2001: 35) wrote that:

> 'The real brake on the project was the measuring of the photographs. Rather than prints these were glass plate negatives, each containing hundreds of star images. Cheaper to employ, young women were engaged in the repetitive task of measuring the plates to determine the position of each star image with great accuracy.'

The measurers sat together, working in pairs as seen in the photograph of Mary Ellen Waterford and Ethel Wilcox using what is now artefact H10140 (Figure 3:3). There are several plate measuring machines in the Observatory collection. Each had specific characteristics and errors. Artefact H10140 (Figure 3:4) had an eyepiece specified by Turner and made by Troughton and Simms, London, but the main body was likely to have been made in Sydney Observatory's own workshop under H.C. Russell's guidance. I used Robert Gordon's method of determining significance (Gordon, 1993:75) to better understand how these machines were used and this, combined with a letter from Henry Chamberlain Russell to Troughton and Simms, provided information about the design and manufacture than had previously been noted. The nature of the work, slow, exacting and eye-straining, was revealed.

Figure 3:3 Mary Ellen Waterford and Ethel Wilcox using what is now artefact H10140, Collection: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.

Figure 3:4 Harley W. Wood, Director of Sydney Observatory, using the Melbourne Astrographic Telescope in the Astrographic Dome, 1958. Collection: Sydney Morning Herald Archives. Scanned from print in the Powerhouse Museum Collection.

The machine and the measurers were an essential part of the scientific process. Stability for the measuring machines was essential and sturdy tables were procured. The measurers rotated every thirty minutes to reduce eyestrain and promote concentration. On some plates there could have been as many as 5,000 stars (Turner, 1912:62), on others less than 100. To reduce error the plates were measured at least twice. Sydney Observatory women measured 743,593 stars in its region (Wood, 1960: 1279) plus a number of the transferred Melbourne plates.

The pace at which the women could measure was important. In 1907 Perth astronomer W.E. Cooke wrote to H.H. Turner[8]:

> 'At present we have only two girls here and they are, of course, slow just now. By the way, can you give me any idea of the average speed one ought to expect in the task of measuring?'

Turner testing his workers reported that:

> '…we may take fifty stars per hour as a fair average rate for one person (though two people working together can do better).' (Turner, 1912; 62)

Of the fifty eight people employed in Australia to measure the star plates, all except one, were female. However there is little acknowledgement of their work, except in terms of the lack of money to employ more 'girls' and the noting of their initials against the measurements in the printed catalogue.

Harley Weston Wood (Figure 3:5), the astronomer who completed both the Sydney and Melbourne Observatories Astrographic Catalogue and wrote a fine history of the work which was published in the fifty third Volume of the Sydney Zone in 1971, was an exception. Wood not only lists the names of those who worked on the Sydney Astrograph, he acknowledges and thanks the measurers for their work, singling out Winsome Bellamy (Figure 3:6)[9], who worked for over twenty years on the catalogue, and Margaret Colville. In Australia, Wood is recognised for his work in astronomy, especially his contribution to the field of astrometry (R. Russell, 2008: 168). The keynote address at the annual Astronomical Society of Australia conference is named in his honour.

In his analysis of the laboratory Latour ascribed importance to the material layout of the workspace which is often forgotten once the data sheet is produced (Latour, 1979: 69). Similarly, for the Astrographic Catalogue and Carte du Ciel, it was the measuring devices and their users that were the vital link between the plates and the production of useful catalogues. The Australian network was often in jeopardy as the linkage between the development of the star image and its measurement was regularly broken due to lack of government support. There could be a lag of decades between the development of the glass plate negative, the production of data through its measurement, the difficult and time consuming calculation of the plate constants and then another delay before the catalogue was printed. For example, a number of the Melbourne plates which had been taken in 1915 were not measured until 1956 or later in Sydney.

Figure 3:3 Harley W. Wood, Director of Sydney Observatory, using the Melbourne Astrographic Telescope in the Astrographic Dome, 1958. Collection: Sydney Morning Herald Archives. Scanned from print in the Powerhouse Museum Collection.

Figure 3:4 Winsome Bellamy using the Hilger Measuring Machine, 1960s. Reproduced courtesy Winsome Bellamy, Collection: Sydney Observatory.

The last Perth Catalogue, volume three, was published in 1952, the last Melbourne Catalogue, volume eight, was published in 1962 and the remaining Sydney Catalogue volume fifty two in 1963, with an explanation in a following volume, fifty three, published in 1971 (Wood, 1971: 9-11; O'Hora, 1988: 137). Since the meeting in Paris and commitment to the project, the Astrographic Catalogue had taken Australian Observatories seventy six years to complete their section and the Carte du Ciel, which included fainter stars, was never finished due to the expense involved in publishing the charts.

In the late twentieth century a number of papers were highly critical of the Carte du Ciel and Astrographic catalogues as detrimental to the observatories which participated in the project (Orchiston 1988; White 1988:45-51). More recently there has been a resurgence of interest in this project's astronomical legacy and this has transpired to ways of dealing with the vast quantity of paper with hand-written observational data, measurements and calculations and the glass plates themselves (Lieber, 2010; Hirschfield, 2004). Admiral Mouchez, the instigator of the project, was aware of the legacy of scientific instrumentation and records, founding the Paris Observatory archive in 1885 (Debarbat 1988: 103).

While in Australia the Carte du Ciel does not appear to have made inroads for women in astronomy, there is a vast legacy of material from the project that remains unresolved. This holds potential to acknowledge their presence. In 1986 the Astrographic dome, the plates, the Hilger measuring machine and Star Cameras were removed from Sydney Observatory (Figure 3:7). Moves have been made for their return and with that there is the opportunity for women to re-appear in the history of astronomy on this site.

Figure 3:5 Moving the Astrographic Dome from Sydney Observatory, 1986. Photographer and copyright: Dr. N. Lomb.

While women working on the Carte du Ciel were confined by their gender to certain types of work, when women did make a move into research barriers of a different type existed. In 1951 the only woman working at the Division of Radio-Physics in Sydney (Figure 3:8), Ruby Payne-Scott resigned when her marriage became known because she was pregnant. The Australian Government's Commonwealth Scientific Industrial Research Organisation (CSIR) had, like all public service departments at that time, a regulation prohibiting married women from holding a

permanent position. This policy stood for all women until 1972. Payne-Scott was pivotal in the discovery of Radio-Physics as applied to astronomy and the now-named CSIRO has titled an award in her honour for women returning to work after taking leave for the birth of a child.

In 2009 the International Astronomical Union (IAU) stated that only 13% of its members are women[10] and Australia is one of the countries with the lowest representation of females. At the University of Sydney, an institution that prides itself in attracting women across all its faculties, of the 153 students enrolled in postgraduate physics only 23% are women, less than the comparable science of Chemistry where women comprise 40% of post-graduate students[11].

Evidence suggests that the Astrographic Catalogue confined Alice to viewing stars fixed on a glass plate, made women invisible and created a threshold that led to the Wonderland of observational astronomy, but provided no means of access. Radio-Physics was to be the illusive White Rabbit and there is evidence that women are still chasing him through the corridors of universities and scientific organisations.

Sydney and Melbourne Observatories were once private places, the astronomer's home, as well as scientific workplaces. Now they are public sites, charged with inspiring engagement in astronomy and its history. Only Perth Observatory, relocated to a dark sky site in the 1960s, still undertakes scientific research. Arguably the legacy of the Carte du Ciel and the Astrographic catalogue is in the advances in astronomy made through photography and the regimentation of science that evolved from new methods and instruments which were standardised across all participating Observatories for the project.

Figure 3:6 International Union of Radio Science conference at the University of Sydney, photo likely taken 11 August 1952. Ruby Payne-Scott is the only woman in the group. Collection: ATNF Historical Photographic Archive: B2842-43. Used with permission.

Notes

1. Alice may have been comparing herself to a marine telescope. However, I am interpreting this statement to refer to the quest for larger and larger telescopes occurring at the time based on events in Oxford when Carroll was writing.
2. Yinalung Yenu: Women's Journey was an exhibition curated by James Wilson Miller for the Powerhouse Museum in 2008-2009.
3. H.C. Russell apologises to Mouchez in a letter dated 6th January 1887 for contacting him directly, however, it is from this date that he continues in direct correspondence with Mouchez (Chinicci, 1999: 352).
4. In her sample of British women working in astronomy Kidwell states that 64% of females were unmarried and 36% married or widowed: 226.
5. Quoted from Williamina Fleming: 'A Field for women's work in astronomy', Astronomy and Astro-Physics 12, 1893, p 684
6. Kidwell's reference is the Annual Report of the Astronomer Royal for Scotland, from 1909/1919, No 20.
7. The Brisbane Courier article states the hours were 9am to 6pm Mon-Fri, and 8am to noon on Saturday.
8. Primary source: Cooke Letter book, 1907-11, p85, 19th June 1907, signed W.Cooke. (Utting, 2000: 280).
9. Winsome Bellamy is one of the women recently interviewed for my thesis.
10. From the Press release of the IAU Resolution to support women in Astronomy which was passed at XXVII General Assembly in 2009 held in Rio de Janiero.
11. The percentages were deduced from the listing of names on the University of Sydney Science Faculty website for post-graduates enrolled in Astro Physics, 2010, compared to those enrolled in Chemistry for the same period.

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY GUÐRÚN D. WHITEHEAD

Funny Money:
Eighteenth Century humorous 'evasions' - an imaginative way of circumventing the counterfeiting laws

BRIDGET MILLMORE

Abstract

This paper discusses the relationship between people and money in the late eighteenth century through an investigation of counterfeit halfpennies known as 'evasions'. Produced as intentional misrepresentations rather than copies of regal money, these imitations offer evidence of an inventive response to the risk of prosecution for counterfeiting coppers; a capital felony after 1771. The article examines the development of 'evasions' as hybrid counterfeits adopting aspects of both regal coins and the commercial tokens produced between 1787 and 1797. It argues that their creation demonstrates the opportunism of craftsmen and disdain for a government, which failed to acknowledge the commercial needs of manufacturers. With changing definitions of what is idiosyncratic in museums, these artefacts offer a story of 'funny money' as a profitable sideline for token-makers at a time when the essential small change needed to facilitate both routine transactions and increasing industrial intensification was in a dire state.

Keywords: money, counterfeiting, evasions, eighteenth century.

> **"**The present distress is inconceivable; the poor Labourer cannot for one Halfpenny in ten get a Drop of Small Beer or a Bit of Bread, nor has the Vender good Halfpence to give in Change, so it occasions Thousands of Quarrels and Heart-Burnings, and almost a Stagnation of Retail Trade"(Anonymous, 1770).

This extract entitled *Letter from A Friend to the Poor* captures the frustrations experienced by the 'lower ranks' when trying to pay for food and drink with an assortment of metallic money characteristic of what was in circulation at this time; worn regal coins - legitimate money produced by the Royal Mint -, commercial tokens and counterfeits - manufactured independently by towns and merchants for use in place of official currency. Where every

transaction was accompanied by uncertainty as to whether these varied specimens would be accepted or refused, the relationship between people and money was frequently strained.

Recent research into the problems of small change and the increase in forgeries in Britain in the second half of the eighteenth century has explored the social and economic impact of the dearth and gluts of regal and counterfeit coppers (Muldrew, 2001) (Finn, 2003) (Valenze, 2006) (King, 2004). Economic historians such as Selgin (2008), Redish (2000), Anderson (1970) and Mathias (1979), including probing the reasons for such a shortage of low value currency, offer theoretical explanations for this, pointing to how 'good' or legally coined money, was driven out of circulation by 'bad' or counterfeit money. They detail the different actions or lack of action taken by, for example, the Royal Mint and commercial coin producers, in attempting to remedy the lack of coppers, but rarely consider the attitudes that people developed towards the currency, in an environment where paying for something on a daily basis involved using counterfeit coins on account of the scarcity of 'legal' money in circulation.

Numismatists such as Peck (1960), Skingley (2007) and Craig (1953) have produced comprehensive catalogues of the different types of coin minted during the eighteenth century, estimating the value of such coins depending on their levels of wear, but rarely link the production and condition of the currency to the social interactions between money and people.[1] Indeed their particular focus on selecting and recording the best quality examples of historic currency means that counterfeit, marked or altered coins are not always valued as collectible pieces and are therefore much more difficult for the researcher to locate, identify and analyse in current collections.[2] Numismatic collections of forgeries are sometimes referred to as 'black museums' or 'black cabinets', highlighting their 'otherness', and keeping them apart from the genuine coins and tokens preserved by collectors with the intention, as one eighteenth century commentator wrote 'of collecting and preserving….species of coinage which….do credit to the Artist who had assisted in it, and shew posterity to what an improved state the Art had advanced at the present times.'(R.Y, 1796: 753).

Studies of counterfeit currency, including the work of John Styles on gold coins in Yorkshire (Styles, 1980) and Malcolm Gaskill on the crime and punishment of coining (Gaskill, 2000), explore the mixture of empathy and indifference expressed by the 'lower ranks' towards the trade of counterfeiting, accepting it as a short term response to economic difficulties rather than a challenge to the government's economic ineptitude. However, an area of investigation which remains under-researched in the study of money is the relationship between people and the small change needed for everyday exchanges; a relationship which was often put under considerable stress as is illustrated by the following contemporary account,

> 'I received last week a small Bill of Sixteen Shillings, Five Shillings of it (as I was told) in Halfpence, neatly tied up in Paper: on opening the Parcel some Days after, I picked out no less than twenty-nine base Pieces of Metal, some with no Stamp on them, and never had any; I dare not return them for fear of offending, and it vexes me to pay them to my honest Labourers, who must pass them at the Ale-House, where I find they never refuse them' (Anonymous, 1769).

The current paper stems from a doctoral project examining the material culture of eighteenth century love tokens made from copper coins rubbed smoothed, engraved and personalised with idioms and images of separation and affection. The initial work for the thesis involved an investigation into the money from which the love tokens were fashioned and so led to the discovery of the 'evasions' under discussion. This article takes an interdisciplinary approach to exploring what Leora Auslander describes as 'the relation between people and things in the abstract' (Auslander, 2005: 110). It begins with a close scrutiny of 'evasions' and the deliberate replacement of the well known text and image of the King and Britannia with historic figures and humorous phrases, in order to address the question of why and how they were made, before considering the enterprise of those involved in their production and the different attitudes towards such counterfeits. The intention of this paper is to determine what 'evasions' are revealed about eighteenth century attitudes towards money and government where counterfeiters profited from the growing industrialisation of the country and the neglect of the Royal Mint.

The meaning of money and importance of exchange

Where today it is understood that a pint of milk costs fifty pence (or thereabouts) wherever it is on sale around the country, and it is acceptable to buy it with a combination of silver and copper coins or expect change from paper money, this assumption of a universal price and universal currency was not part of the culture of the 'lower ranks' during the eighteenth century. What was more likely was that 'customary expectation' allowed for everyday financial transactions to be negotiated and metallic money was just one of the established forms of payment for food and lodging. As a result, financial interactions were more often founded on individual relationships rather than the more impersonal exchanges associated with standardised prices and currency (Lemire, 2005: 103). Where income often fluctuated through seasonal and irregular employment, there was a real need for informal and flexible practices in paying for things. In this context money was valuable to people as an object of exchange rather than as a signifier of material gain. It was one type of payment amongst a range of alternative strategies or combinations of strategies used for economic survival.

Figure 5:1 George III 'cartwheel'- regal issue - 1797 - author's coin and photograph, JPEG files

Figure 5:2 Two copper evasions - one with Brutus Sextus on obverse and one with Alfred the Great on obverse – Heberden Coin Room Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Oxford, - author's photograph, JPEG files

Figure 5:3 Two copper evasions – one with Britannia Rules on reverse and one with Pitt for Ever on reverse - Heberden Coin Room Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Oxford, - author's photograph, JPEG files

Evasions

Evasions are lightweight forgeries. Instead of the normal 'GULIELMUS III', 'GEORGIUS II' or 'GEORGIUS III' on the obverse sides of regal copper halfpennies (Figure 5:1), evasions may display peculiar misspellings, such as GOERGIUV, or 'GLACIOUS', re-workings of the names into forms including 'GEORGE RULES', 'GLORIOUS III', 'GEORGE SUSSEX' or more blatantly incorrect appellations, as 'GULIELMUS SHAKESPEAR', 'ALFRED THE GREAT' and 'BRUTUS SEXTUS' (Figure 5:2). Similarly the reverse sides use corruptions of 'BRITANNIA', amongst them 'RULE BRITANNIA', 'BRITONS RULE', 'BRITISH GIRLS', 'BONNY GIRL', 'BRITANNIA RULES THE MAIN' and 'BRITISH TARS' (Figure 5:3). Imagery was also often altered. The silhouette of 'Alfred the Great' for instance is shaped more like that of Napoleon Bonaparte with a pronounced forehead, than the familiar laurelled bust of George III (see Figure 5:2). Britannia's outline and details at a glance often look similar to a regal coin but on close examination are crude copies of the recognisable figure.

Just under five hundred different types of 'evasions' are listed in the comprehensive catalogue of British Tokens (Withers and Withers, 2010).[3] However this grouping is very much the result of the work of nineteenth and twentieth century numismatists and their classification systems. Eighteenth century collectors did not recognise these coins as counterfeits, let alone consider them as a distinctive 'type' with distinguishing features. James Conder's *An Arrangement of Provincial Coins, Tokens, and Medalets* lists a number of what are now considered 'evasions' under the category 'Not local' (Conder, 1798: 210). It was not until the work of James Atkins in the late nineteenth century that 'evasions' were given their own classification with the heading *Imitations of the Regal Coinage* (Atkins, 1892) and grouped together because of their idiosyncratic characteristics: lightweight, poorly minted, with misspellings and misrepresentations of the images and legends found on regal coins. Some examples carry features from both regal coins and commercial tokens with a combination of re-workings of the historic names portrayed on the legends of commercial pieces and crude versions of the images of Britannia found on legal halfpennies.

Close scrutiny of the descriptions of images and legends in Withers reveals that some examples have only subtle differences from the familiar spellings found on the legends on regal copper halfpennies and farthings, whereas others draw on a range of portraits which would have also been frequently found on commercial tokens of the 1780s and 1790s. E. H. Gombrich writes that '…it is not really the perception of likeness for which we are originally programmed, but the noticing of unlikeness, the departure from the norm which stands out and sticks in the mind' (Gombrich, 1972: 13). It is this deliberate unlikeness, characteristic of evasions, which jars and prompts the observer to ask further questions about these imitations. Understanding the value of money conditions which stimulated the flourishing of the counterfeiting trade in the eighteenth century provides the context in which to consider how and why 'evasions' were made.

Counterfeit copper coins

'Copper coins with us are properly not money, but a kind of *tokens* passing by way of exchange instead of parts of the smallest pieces of silver coin; and as such, very useful in small home traffic,' wrote Joseph Harris, Assay Master at the Royal Mint in a footnote to his commentary on money and coins (Harris, 1757: 45). Arguing that copper was not a suitable metal for coins since it was difficult to ascertain its precise value and purity, this quote illustrates the disinterested stance of The Royal Mint to the need for, and therefore production of, any currency other than gold and silver. As a result of this entrenched approach to the minting of regal copper coins, controlled by sinecured officials using antiquated equipment, the output of halfpennies and farthings was very erratic throughout the eighteenth century causing serious shortages, which were also exacerbated by difficulties with both distribution and conversion.

The fact that there was no 'official' system for transporting copper coins around the country combined with the speed with which newly minted currency disappeared either for sale as bullion or to provide the raw material for forgeries, created extraordinary problems for manufacturers and merchants in the regions in obtaining regular supplies of coins to pay for labour. Many factories and businesses in the north and west, starved of copper currency, were forced to use 'bad' money due to the relative expense of transporting 'good' money from London compared to the low cost of locally produced counterfeits (Colquhoun, 1796: 122).

Where these wages spent after pay day in the alehouse ended up, was not of concern to the 'lower ranks', but the difficulties caused by the failure to distribute copper money did have an impact on the availability of coins for small change which was so important for routine purchases. Legally copper coins could be refused for any transaction over the value of sixpence. As a result, large quantities were not accepted by the Royal Mint, the Excise & Revenue, the Bank of England or country banks either for payment or for conversion into silver, gold or paper currency, including bills of exchange. So, the coppers spent in the inn filled the strong boxes of brewers and merchants who were then encumbered with it, unable to re-distribute it either by converting it into silver or gold or using it to pay bills or taxes. A contemporary observer described these problems: 'The free circulation of such halfpence introduced vast quantities, so that shopkeepers of all sorts were greatly oppressed; if they had twenty pounds value in halfpence upon hand they could not pay a bill with *them*' (Merrey, 1794: 67). Whilst some industrialists, especially those in locations far from London, suffered from severe shortages of halfpennies and farthings, other merchants experienced a glut of copper coins which they could not cash in. In his comprehensive history of the Mint, John Craig captures this disconnect between the production and circulation of currency. 'Not only was there no power, had there been knowledge, to direct provision by the Mint towards or away from particular areas according to need; there was no organisation whatever, as banks did not deal in coppers, to redistribute the burdensome

loads which silted up in certain cities' (Craig, 1953: 252). Few commentators have highlighted the contribution this inability to re-distribute copper currency had on the stability and consistency of small change and the subsequent expansion of the counterfeiting trade. Copper, in effect, did not circulate but moved one way only before getting 'stuck'. The short-term response, following persistent canvassing from merchants, was for the Royal Mint to stop the production of copper coins. Hardly any coppers were minted between 1754 and 1775, and none thereafter until Matthew Boulton's Soho Mint 'cartwheels' in 1797 (Feavearyear, 1963: 171).

Two solutions to the dearth, distribution and convertibility problems of low value coins emerged. The first was a flourishing of the profitable counterfeiting trade to meet not only the shortages in general circulation but also the increasing demand from manufacturers to pay their growing workforces in the industrial regions. Counterfeits were made in a number of ways; mostly by melting down regal coins and turning them into lightweight blanks which were cast from moulds or struck using dies to look like genuine coins. The profits were high with two genuine halfpennies providing enough metal for three counterfeits (Withers and Withers, 2010: 476). The scale of operation varied from one person in a garret in London, to organised groups in towns like Birmingham where the skills of button makers were easily transferred to counterfeiting. Writing about the state of coinage Thomas Snelling claimed 'in the beginning of the year 1753 it was computed, that near half or two thirds of the current copper money were counterfeits' (Snelling, 1766: 44). In terms of crime and punishment the offence of counterfeiting copper, unlike silver and gold, which were treasonable offences punishable by death, was from 1742 a simple misdemeanour, which carried a sentence of two years imprisonment. It was not until 1771 when the law changed that counterfeiting copper became a capital offence.

Commercial copper tokens

The second solution to the shortage of circulating halfpennies and farthings in the late eighteenth century was the commercial production of trade tokens. From the late 1780s manufacturers and some towns started to produce their own token currency. One of the first and most iconic tokens was the Anglesey Copper Company's 'Druid', recognisable by the hooded and bearded head. Tokens were more difficult than regal coins to forge because they were produced to a high quality with an extraordinary range of images including portraits of famous people, remarkable buildings, historical events, animals, landscapes and symbols as well as patriotic, religious, political, and commemorative legends. Indeed travelling salesmen carried up to fifty different designs in their sample boxes (Craig, 1953: 254). Tokens quickly became popular by providing people with a low value coin where the Mint had failed to even recognise a growing need, let alone taken action to halt the shortage of copper currency. There is some disagreement, however, among researchers as too how convertible trade tokens were outside their locations (Dykes, 2004, 173). Ironically, the Mint eventually acknowledged these commercial coins as legal tender and continued to

do so until 1817. The motto 'pro bono publico' was widely used on tokens in an attempt to demonstrate to the government that the motivation for issue was one of public benefit rather than base profit.

Production of 'evasions'

The growing demand for commercial tokens for trade, shop advertising, political campaigns, and as commemorative or collectable pieces involved the skilled work of die sinkers, often attached to the metal working trade in Birmingham. (Die sinking involved engraving dies with a design, which was then stamped onto a blank metal disc to create for example a coin, medal or a button.) Producing counterfeits in the form of 'evasions', approximately thirty percent lighter than regal halfpennies, offered such craftsmen an attractive and extremely profitable sideline, making ready use of their particular skill set. The deliberate misrepresentations on these counterfeits provided a way around the counterfeiting law of 1771, the producer avoiding trial for a capital offence for the following reason: if an imitation coin was not an exact copy of a regal issue then it was not viewed as a forgery and in effect counterfeiters who created 'evasions' could not, therefore, be prosecuted for making or circulating them. In this way, these *non*-copies, with whimsical legends, poor quality images, mismatches in dates, were all part of a profitable enterprise which did not carry any of the capital risks associated with forging replica copper currency.

In the 1790s Birmingham was home to fifteen token making manufacturers many of whom were described in local trade directories as button makers. Among these were William Lutwyche and Peter Kempson, who apparently were also responsible for producing 'evasions', especially between 1796 and 1798, when orders for trade tokens diminished (Dykes, 2004: 168). Close examination of the dates on 'evasions', which although unreliable may have some truth in them, shows that most are dated post 1771; coincidentally the year the law changed and made counterfeiting copper currency a capital felony. Some examples have obviously spurious dates, providing yet more evidence of the humorous characteristics of these coins. For example, one 'evasion' is dated 1761 and portrays Charles Fox who would have been only twelve years old in that year (Cobwright, 1988: 61). Another feature of 'evasions' which helps date them is that several use the legends found on trade tokens, for example 'Peace and Plenty', 'Rule Britannia' which appeared on tokens produced in the last two decades of the eighteenth century.

How did people respond to 'evasions'

An initial reading of the re-worked legends and surrogate portraits on 'evasions' suggests these pieces were expressions of derision for state and monarch, echoing, for example, the prints of James Gillray whose satirical caricatures of George III depicted him variously as a drain on Britannia, as an oriental tyrant and in later years more benignly as a homespun farmer. Indeed George III weathered shifting popularity for example during the American War of Independence, the French Revolution and the development of his mental illness. His

replacement with figures symbolic of patriotism as well as betrayal and revolution, may reflect the nature of fluctuating public approbation. The figure of Britannia or the Irish Harp, albeit a poor quality portrayal, appears on all the 'evasions', asserting a strong sense of patriotism and belief in martial strength in contrast to some of the satirical figures on the obverse. This patriotic aspect resonates through commercial tokens as well as 'evasions', marking and celebrating Britain's military and naval activities in North America and France in the later part of the century.

However, a closer reading of 'evasions' reveals strong links between these pieces and commercial trade tokens, consequently pointing to a less political and more economic explanation for these humorous pieces. Legends found on trade tokens were also used on 'evasions' thus supporting the observation that their production was primarily profit driven, transferring the skills of button and token making to counterfeiting, rather than political or satirical commentary. For the contributor to the *Gentleman's Magazine* in September 1798, they were 'barbarous mutilations and imitations of the public money and their fabrication was peculiarly contemptible' (C.SH, 1798: 744). Indeed the circulation of imitation copper coins had little impact on the elite who depended predominately on credit as well as gold and silver coins. For the manufacturers who resorted to counterfeits to pay wages, they may have been viewed more as a simple public service, providing small change bought from 'agents' rather than the Royal Mint. The political satire expressed in the legends may have brought a smile to their faces as well as resonated with their own frustrations with the government in failing to act over the problem of insufficient small change but first and foremost they were important for economic survival.

For the 'lower ranks' who would have recognised 'evasions' as counterfeits, they may have been viewed with both suspicion and resignation. Where the authenticity of money was often in doubt, metallic money carried associations of mistrust and suspicion. However, since handling forged currency was part of everyone's experience and the poor were often in no position to refuse it as payment or change, the exchange of counterfeit coins became in effect 'normalised'. The Old Bailey proceedings were full of references to 'bad' money and people's attitude to it. At John While's trial in 1772, for counterfeiting shillings (not coppers), one of the witnesses, Joseph Thompson, was asked if he would have accepted payment of a counterfeit shilling and his reply revealed the ubiquity and possibly the necessity of counterfeit small change – 'a man often takes bad money in change and does not know it'.[4] Such a statement illustrates the fact that with so little small change, the normal behaviour was - to not look too closely and take 'bad money' if you believed it could 'pass' as good money (Snelling, 1766: 44). The unpredictability of how and when counterfeit coins might be rejected undoubtedly placed additional strain on people's trust in coins. 'Evasions' were one form of currency among many and the issue, which concerned the 'lower ranks', was a purely practical one of whether they were 'passable' or whether shopkeepers would refuse them.

Conclusion

If copper coins were not considered to be 'proper' currency by the Royal Mint, then the government had in effect abandoned one of its economic functions in supplying the nation with the coinage needed to facilitate commerce and through this neglect had created a profit making opportunity for private enterprise to seize. In effect the counterfeiter and provincial token-maker took over the manufacture of copper currency between 1775 and 1797. By foregrounding the coins in this investigation, the research has revealed the complex nature of the relationship between people and the metallic money needed for everyday transactions where coins were valued as objects of exchange vital for daily economic survival rather than as signs of material gain. This object driven approach has illustrated the close associations between 'evasions' and commercial trade tokens in contrast to the disaffected attitude of the government towards copper currency. The creation of 'evasions' offered the counterfeiter a chance to make money, the manufacturer a means to pay for the labour needed to produce goods, the Royal Mint an annoyance best ignored and the labourer a means of exchange for food, drink and lodging but also a source of tension in their possible rejection. Without counterfeits such as 'evasions' and commercial trade tokens to pay labourers in the industrial centres around the country, the manufacture of consumer goods, which defined the material culture of the eighteenth century may well have developed differently. From this perspective the production of 'evasions' could be seen as part of a counter-culture of enterprising ingenuity in the face of the conservatism of the Royal Mint and the economic short sightedness of the government.

Notes

1. See Craig, J. (1953). *The Mint, A History of the London Mint from A.D 287 to 1948.* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. Peck, C. W. (1960). *English Copper, Tin and Bronze Coins in the British Museum 1558-1958.* London, The Trustees of the British Museum. pp 172 –183 Skingley,P (ed) (2007). *Coins of England & the United Kingdom.* London, Spink & Son Ltd.
2. Mulholland Cobwright has collected and researched 'evasions' in great detail. See Cobwright, M. (1993). A Journey through the Monkalokian Rain Forests in search of the Spiney Fubbaduck. Beeston, Coins of Beeston.and Cobwright, M. (1988). Evasive Halfpennies. *Coins and Medals,* 25**,** 59-61. Other numismatic articles include Dykes, D. (2004). Some Reflections on Provincial Coinage. *The British Numismatic Journal,* 74**,** 160 -174., Pierrepont Barnard, F. (1926). Forgery of English Copper Money in the Eighteenth Century. *Numismatic Chronicle,* 6**,** 341-360, Mays, J. (1976). Britain's Imitation Regals. *Coins and Medals,* 13**,** 16-18.and Brunel, C. 1972. When Imitation Did Not Flatter. *Coins and Medals,* 9**,** 21-23.

3. Withers' book refers to Atkins, J. (1892). *The Tradesmen's Tokens of the Eighteenth Century*. London, W.S.Lincoln & Son. and Cobwright, M. (1993). A Journey through the Monkalokian Rain Forests in search of the Spiney Fubbaduck. Coins of Beeston.
4. *Old Bailey Proceedings* (www.oldbaileyonline.org Version 6.0 25 July 2010) September 1772, Trial of John While (t17720909-23)

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Grande Exhibitions' Traveling Museum: A Modern Cabinet of Curiosity

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Abstract

In 2006, when Australian-based Grande Exhibitions—an international company that creates and markets autonomous touring exhibitions using current technology—unveiled its very first traveling exhibit, it focused on Leonardo da Vinci, Renaissance artist, writer, and inventor, and a collector of curiosities in his own right. In my article, Grande Exhibitions is presented as a cabinetmaker that takes advantage of various multi-media projections and constructions to rearrange and reframe continuously the relationship between the objects and viewers. The primary focus is on the first of Grand Exhibitions' shows, "Da Vinci—A Genius," which incorporates 3D projections and large-size replicas of da Vinci's most famous machine inventions. A folio page from his sixteenth-century *Notebooks*, the exhibit today, and even Grande Exhibitions itself are all read through the lens of Walter Benjamin's notion of "aura," John Berger's idea of spectatorship, and Jacques Derrida's sense of frames, in order present how the collector paradoxically transforms into the curio.

Keywords: Leonardo da Vinci, Walter Benjamin, John Berger, Jacques Derrida, Cabinet of Curiosity, Museum displays.

> One can have no smaller or greater mastery than mastery of oneself.
>
> —Leonardo da Vinci, *Notebooks*

In 2006, when Australian-based Grande Exhibitions, an international company that creates and markets autonomous touring exhibitions, unveiled its very first traveling exhibit, it focused on Leonardo da Vinci, Renaissance artist, writer, and inventor, and a collector of curiosities in his own right. It is no surprise that they chose da Vinci as their focus since they

already owned and operated two permanent museums dedicated to this collector of curiosities in his own right: "Il Genio di Leonardo da Vinci Museo" in Florence and Venice, Italy. As an interactive exhibition, "Da Vinci—A Genius" (formerly known as "Da Vinci—An Exhibition of Genius, 1452-1519") is composed of da Vinci's drawings and paintings, anatomical studies, and the major scientific studies and inventions found in his *Notebooks*.[1] From 3D projections of two of da Vinci's most famous works, *The Last Supper* and the *Vitruvian Man*, alongside a replication of his most ambitious sculpture project, the *Sforza Horse*, and large recreations of his most famous machine inventions, this is an exhibit that seeks to engage actively with its viewers.

This engagement is one of wonder, which occurs from the very moment the viewer enters the exhibition and encounters da Vinci's earliest works at the beginning of the exhibition and his latter ones at the end. Amidst this organization that draws attention to a seeming historical chronology, there is also an equal emphasis on the comparative similarities between da Vinci's ideas and their modern recreations throughout the exhibition. For example, throughout the exhibition the viewer perceives the juxtaposition of da Vinci's mechanical inventions, facsimiles of folios from the *Notebooks* and a variety of reproduced artwork in an intimate setting. With this twofold, contrasting emphasis and encyclopedic approach, Grande Exhibitions clearly aims to educate as well as mystify its viewers.

Grande Exhibitions' encyclopedic approach to collecting da Vinci's scientific and artistic oeuvre is what Sharon Macdonald would call 'fundamental to the idea of the museum'.[2] In turn, its practice of display is reminiscent of what Foucault identifies as the practice of epistemological collecting during the 'epoch of simultaneity'. In the essay 'Of Other Spaces', Foucault presents the idea of an 'epoch of space' in modern times whereby knowledge is organized and conveyed because of its practice of simultaneity and use of juxtaposition.[3] In this versatile space that permits and demands for the side-by-side of incongruent elements like things that are culturally near and far, the experience of the world is now gleaned. This Foucauldian 'epoch of juxtaposition' is based on an interconnectedness that collects and begets knowledge that is at once natural and artificial, not unlike a Renaissance cabinet of curiosity.

Neapolitan Ferrante Imperato's 1599 Renaissance engraving *Dell'Historia Naturale* depicts the Renaissance cabinet of curiosity and visually defines its primary aim: to amass oddities. With man-made shelves, built-in cabinets, and pull-down doors in a private room accessible only through the bedchamber, Imperato's illustration shows how this collector's *space* is a construction that embraces the idea of a Foucauldian notion of juxtaposition. For example, within the room itself, natural objects such as animals and minerals, are displayed alongside odd specimens and medieval books. While a medieval book and a mineral may have nothing in common to the represented spectators who point and gaze in awe, the side-by-side display of seemingly disparate objects finds their interconnectedness because of their simultaneity in *this* space. Imperato's representation of a cabinet of curiosity, thus, proffers

that the act of collecting and the sense of wonder towards a collection are as intertwined as the juxtaposed taxidermied alligator and medieval book.

As it has been presented, the Foucauldian notion of an 'epoch of space' can extend beyond the physical space to also the epistemological practices through time. In *Marvelous Possessions*, Stephen Greenblatt echoes Foucault's idea of simultaneity by pointing out that contemporary curiosities have much in common with the Renaissance 'marvelous object', not least of which is that they inspire a sense of wonder.[4] Greenblatt suggests that there is an apparent interconnection of display practices employed by both a Renaissance cabinet of curiosity and a modern-day museum display. Most recently, Stephen Bann echoes this sentiment by calling attention to the fact that contemporary museum displays are undergoing 'a kind of historical *ricorso* to curiosity'.[5] Much like the Renaissance collector who builds the cabinets, the task of today's museum curator and critic alike falls prey to the temptation to organize the chaos of these marvelous possessions into a coherent narrative that still invokes awe within the viewer. It is in this light that Grande Exhibitions' interactive exhibition, "Da Vinci—A Genius" must be examined, a modern cabinet of curiosity that uses both the space of display and current technology to instill wonder.

Finding and Making Modern Curiosities: *Da Vinci—A Genius*

As the Grande Exhibitions' catalogue emphasizes, the comprehensive scope of *Da Vinci—A Genius* is presented 'under one roof'; one of its kind, it is equal almost to the 'rare, fragile and priceless' inventions themselves.[6] The catalogue goes on to stress the exhibit's commercial appeal because 'all can *marvel* at the brilliance of this great mind'.[7] Again according to their website, Grande Exhibitions advertises 'broad mass appeal'[8] as one of its profitable features so that prospective venues would be interested in renting their traveling exhibits. In the case of *Da Vinci—A Genius*, the unparalleled focus on the artist is for the viewer's benefit, allowing the magnitude of da Vinci's stature as "genius" to remain undisputed just as the exhibition itself projects its own outstanding ability to craft da Vinci's innovative technologies, in some cases for the first time. The catalogue, like the traveling exhibit itself, thus privileges the spectator by re-presenting the past in a present moment. In doing so, this model ironically transforms da Vinci's inventions from rare, fragile, or priceless artifacts, into reproduced (and reproducible) technological novelties.

If according to Greenblatt, the task of a cabinet of curiosity is to mesmerize the viewer with individual specimens within their paradigmatic arrangements, then Grande Exhibitions proffers a wondrous spectacle with most of da Vinci's inventions standing side-by-side in life-like proportions. What makes these models even more astonishing is that Grande Exhibitions employed Italian artisans, who for the most part used the very same materials and techniques available to da Vinci in fifteenth-century Italy.[9] Grande Exhibitions' aim for da Vinci's inventions to be realistic and enticing to the viewer is made possible not only with the attention paid to the authenticity of materials and the location of their construction, but

also to the machines' scale. Some of the reproductions are small in size, others are truly life-like as da Vinci envisioned them, and even others are larger-than-life for the viewer's appreciation and edification, all of which stress that the gaze and the display are crucial for the show's success as an interactive, educational tool. With the awesome reproductions, da Vinci's genius is paid homage. But more suggestively Grande Exhibitions emerges as the cabinetmaker of a unique collection as-yet-unseen. In other words, what Grande Exhibitions ultimately displays are not da Vinci's inventions alone, but Leonardo da Vinci himself; the persona surfaces as the true curiosity in this traveling cabinet.

It is, however, impossible to access this persona without the context of his works. Da Vinci's *Notebooks* have long been esteemed by many scholars to be the treasure trove and key to his overall *oeuvre*. Robert Zwijnenberg claims in *The Writing and Drawings of Leonardo da Vinci*, that da Vinci's *Notebooks* are the most important of his activities, perhaps even the foundation of the others'.[10] The *Notebooks* have survived as loose fragments torn from the original notebooks and reassembled—literally cut and pasted in some circumstances—into ten very different codices located all over the world, from England, Italy, Spain, France, and the United States. While the folio pages are fragments in the sense that they are scattered around the world without knowledge of their original pagination and interconnectedness, Zwijnenberg disagrees that they should be considered disparate or chaotic in the modern pejorative meaning of the word.[11] The purpose of the *Notebooks* was not about organization or categorization *per se*, and much less about following a linear narrative trajectory; rather, the *Notebooks* reveal one man's scientific and artistic curiosity for nature, the human, and the world. In sum, the fragmentary status of the *Notebooks* attests to their *collectedness*, i.e. a synecdoche of collecting, as well as their collective value for enthusiasts like Grande Exhibitions and da Vinci himself. Zwijnenberg further posits that the *Notebooks* need to be seen as a 'useful and functional instrumen[t] with which to acquire knowledge of the world',[12] like a stream-of-consciousness narrative.

Da Vinci's fragmented *Notebooks* should not, however, be mistaken with mere sketches that represent rough, short, and unfinished ideas. Instead they should be seen as a record of da Vinci's curiosity itself, evocative of early Modern Italy's growing fascination with collecting.[13] Paula Findlen claims in *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* that 'possessing nature was part of a more widespread delight in collecting objects of scientific worth' and that this act of collecting was a 'key to understanding their world'.[14] It is in this vein of thought that the *Notebooks* should be understood, as a verbal and visual cabinet of curiosity written onto the 2D, flat plane of a page in an effort to articulate 3D inventions and observations.

With so many drawings dedicated to anatomy and the general make-up of engineering, da Vinci clearly was an observer, dissector, and collector of curiosities. For example, one of the Windsor Folios drawings depicts a seemingly haphazard juxtaposition between a human leg in the lower right-hand corner and an early sketch of one of his mechanical inventions in the

lower left-hand part of the page.[15] In jotting down these thoughts and observations together, da Vinci was potentially creating links between the inner workings of a machine's mobility and those of the man. With only a partial sketch of each object, da Vinci was seeing their interconnectedness. He was dissecting man alongside his mechanical inventions in order to grasp both: man was the paradigm for the mechanical inventions, while the machine served as the skeletal frame through which human anatomy was to be understood. This combined methodology of dissection using scientific and artistic lenses, resulting in a written paradigmatic comparison, suggests that da Vinci's genius lies truly in his being an early observer and textual cabinetmaker of human and technological curiosities.

To organize and give life to these paradigmatic curiosities in the *Notebooks*, as Grande Exhibitions has done, is perhaps an impossible reading and curatorial task not unlike any attempt to reclaim the loss of 'aura' that Walter Benjamin laments in his seminal essay, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'.[16] Like the Grande Exhibitions' traveling show on da Vinci, the cabinet of curiosity as a mode of (re)presentation permits us to understand better the appeal and need in this day and age for wide-ranging, technologically savvy museum exhibitions of older canonical works, collections, and masters.

In what follows, I propose that the cabinet of curiosity and its praxis could be vital critical tools for understanding the tasks and implications of displaying curiosities from the past (like Grande Exhibitions has done with da Vinci's mechanical inventions in and of itself and by possessing two additional exhibits, *Planet Shark* and *Van Gogh-Alive*). Modern theorists like Walter Benjamin, John Berger, and Jacques Derrida will help to elucidate how Grande Exhibitions successfully demonstrates that mechanical reproductions do indeed cause a decay of aura, allowing in turn for a shift in framing to expose the eponymous curio of the exhibit. Benjamin's notion of the displaced object's eroded, then refurbished aura, combined with Berger's idea of spectatorship in *Ways of Seeing* and Derrida's sense of the frame in *Truth in Painting*, illuminate further how historical curiosities reproduced within a modern cabinet derive their multifarious meaning from displacement and reframing (i.e. in a technologically rendered cabinet).

The Modern Cabinetmaker's Lens: Walter Benjamin, John Berger and Jacques Derrida

In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin introduces the concept of aura as an explication of how modern day re-presentations of past and current works of art can unveil newer understandings toward the public's consumption and experience of these 'sacred' objects. Defined as the art object's special power, a relevant and unique quality that asserted its original historicity, the aura, according to Benjamin, is eroded when mass-produced, *i.e.* when taken from its original cultural milieu and reconfigured through mechanical reproduction. The sacred object, whether relocated, reframed, photocopied, filmed, or photographed, inhabits an essentially new historical and

cultural space once it is moved *as if* it were indeed an oddity, a *curious* object. For Benjamin, the newly-displaced object marked a change of value not only for itself, but for the important epistemological practices of observation and reception. Hence, while Benjamin's particular focus was on photography and cinematography—the new means of mechanical reproduction in his day—this pivotal essay drew and continues to draw attention to how a new context, frame, or border for the work of art could challenge the viewer's critical perception of it. For example, with a penchant to challenge the viewer's critical understanding of an artist and their works of art through an emphasis on traveling, spectatorship, and the creation of new frames 'under one roof', Grande Exhibitions and their innovative exhibits fit the Benjaminian definition of displaced objects.

Grande Exhibitions acts like a hidden museum or clearinghouse that one cannot physically visit but whose attic nevertheless boasts of sheltering rare works of art and collections. Because it markets its pieces out to other museums and venues, it functions much like a specially-curated show. In 2010, Grande Exhibitions marketed five stock exhibits, each of which travelled worldwide, moving from venue to venue with the potential to change with each move. Following the success of *Da Vinci—The Genius*, the company constructed *Planet Shark*, *Secrets of Mona Lisa*, *Van Gogh-Alive*, and *Game On*. Each one of these exhibitions demonstrates both a cabinet of curiosity's theoretical approach to display, reception, and collection, and the company's own role as collector of disparate phenomena. *Planet Shark*, for example, an eco-educational, interactive display, juxtaposes the shark as both predator and prey. Advertised as traveling for no more than three months at a time, the viewer is educated through interactive modules about the animal and about humankind's fascination with it. Amongst the videos and displays, there are also collections of diving cages, hunting and commercial fishing equipment, and fossils not unlike the curiosities found in a traditional cabinet. Besides marvel and fear of the shark, another overarching frame that emerges from this exhibit is a very contemporary, socially and politically charged message: the exhibition works to promote an understanding of how the shark is important for our ecosystem. Clearly treating distinct subject matter, the da Vinci and shark exhibits, as manufactured by a single company, reflect the seemingly unsystematic composition of a traditional cabinet's contents. In other words, similar to Ferrante Imerpato's engraving of a Renaissance cabinet of curiosity, Grande Exhibitions contains on its proverbial shelves a variety of objects such as animals, books and fine art side-by-side.

Since their focus is on 'broad mass appeal', (as cited above) it is not strange that Grande Exhibitions runs the gamut of museum themes, from natural history exhibitions to fine art exhibitions. For example, another recent exhibit is *Van Gogh-Alive*, a multimedia projection of twentieth-century painter Vincent Van Gogh and his works. This is another show that travels for no more than three months at a time, during which the viewers experience Van Gogh's images in a specially created space that permits them 'to be immersed in the artist's work rather than observe it'.[17] With accompanied sound and larger-than-life projections on walls and floors, Grande Exhibitions examines up close Van Gogh's brushstrokes and color

by zooming in on artistry as a curiosity. It allows the viewer to walk literally through the reproduced paintings of Van Gogh. Here technology and high-definition optics are the frames through which artistry, as well as art criticism, are transformed into objects for study and wonder. While this exhibition alone does not establish Grande Exhibitions as a cabinetmaker of curiosities, together with *Planet Shark* and *Da Vinci: A Genius*, it does.

The very fact that Grande Exhibitions delights in having 'its own in-house design,… [which manages] every visual aspect of [a] traveling exhibition',[18] secures their role as cabinetmaker, as *the* manufacturer of what Berger defines as a spectatorship. And yet, as Derrida's analysis of truth and frames in painting illuminates, a cabinetmaker who employs technology as a framing mechanism cannot control this spectatorship, or 'mass appeal', much less what viewers will consider to be the real curiosity. The cabinet therefore takes on a life of its own. Together with Benjamin, all three of these theorists demonstrate that the cabinet of curiosity is a significant system of organization relevant not only for Grande Exhibitions and the manner in which they display their objects, but perhaps for all modern renderings of a cabinet of curiosity that can be found within specific works of art to actual museums—i.e. Joseph Cornell's assemblages and the Old Operating Theatre Museum and Herb Garret in London, to name just two.

Given the primacy of aura for a work of art, Berger argues that Benjamin extolled the virtues of the age of mechanical reproduction because the essay privileged (for Berger) spectatorship—*i.e.* a new dynamic use of the gaze that favored the viewer—over cult veneration—*i.e.* the static experience of an art object's aura that favored the object—as the critical *modus operandi* in the twentieth century.[19] Like Grande Exhibitions' marketing strategy of mass consumption, Berger himself privileges the museum-goer and their relationship with an object's aura. For Berger, the decay of aura is vital, because without it new forms of art or innovative, critical methods that challenge the viewer—like the cabinet of curiosity—would not be possible. Moreover, without a decay of aura and the nostalgic gesture to recreate the art object's historicity, assorted museum exhibitions about the very same objects or artists would not be possible, and perhaps much less appealing for the curator or museum-goer.

Berger's emphasis on spectatorship as a mode of consumption complements Derrida's idea of overlooked frames, or the context and truth-value of a work of art, when considering Grande Exhibitions' traveling cabinets. In contrast to Foucault's idea that the structure of knowledge during the Renaissance was based on similitude, Derrida offers the lens of difference to understand the modern, traveling cabinet. Derrida argues that a truth in painting is an impossibility not unlike a truth in language. There are inherent contradictions and oppositions—*e.g.* inside and outside, the framer and the framed—that make any so-called truth unstable, complex, and impossible.[20] Like an object relocated to a cabinet—seen as curious because of its dislocation from a natural setting to an artificial one—any understanding (*i.e.* placement on a shelf or in a drawer) or description of it (*i.e.* in museum

guidebook or an exhibition catalogue) inevitably reverts to a discussion *around* its curiosity without necessarily being an explanation of it. Constantly vacillating between the framer and framed, a displaced object moves back and forth between cabinets and the epistemological understanding of its curiosity; its meaning is overhauled continuously wherein meaning is only relayed through a passage of difference. Derrida's idea of frames thus suggests that what resides outside the frame is as important as what is depicted within the frame and even the frame itself. Cultural context, therefore, is as important as the work of art within this context, the cabinet that frames it, and the act of collecting itself. *Da Vinci—The Genius*, as an example of this idea, derives meaning from its contemporary placement, its mechanical reproductions, its existence in varied venues, and its curatorial procedures.

Grande Exhibitions: A Derridian Cabinet of Curiosity

In the context of this Derridian-like cabinet of curiosity, the museumgoer who sees one of Grande Exhibitions' traveling cabinets is overwhelmed with everything simultaneously: the curiosities, the collection as a whole, and the cabinet itself, whether literally a shelf, box, an interactive module, a projection, or furniture piece. Separately and all at once, the viewer quickly realizes that the experience of approaching a Grande Exhibitions' cabinet is at once elusive and enticing, not unlike seeing Renaissance curiosities. However, with the eventual decay of aura, Grande Exhibitions closes in on its new contextual meaning: a Derridean wonder. In other words, Grande Exhibitions has transformed the Renaissance cabinet of curiosity into an elusive curiosity itself by employing technology and *différance* to ultimately display the practice of collecting side-by-side to the cabinetmaker himself. Furthermore, by suggesting that the meaning that a work of art conveys is as varied as its effect on a person, and from person to person, Derrida echoes Benjamin's essay in that the frame points out that there is already a loss of aura that is not completely lost. This loss of aura is vital to producing meaning for a work of art. For instance, a museum-goer who visits *Da Vinci—The Genius* will leave with a sense of wonder because they feel as if they have seen a real artifact, even if it is an enlarged facsimile of a folio page from his *Notebooks* or a reproduced, 3D model suggested by one of his sketches.

All in all, Grande Exhibitions' traveling exhibitions emphasize the technologically savvy, relatively mobile cabinet of curiosity, which grants previously seen and unseen objects a new meaning, contextual frames, and experiences no matter where it is displayed in the world. As their website claims, Grande Exhibitions prides itself on the 'highest quality' show,[21] a performative frame through which the multiplicity of meaning is filtered and strained. Since the exhibitions are traveling shows, however, each exhibit cannot help but emphasize in its own unique way the shifting aura and cultural context of the displayed pieces. With an exhibition life cycle of no more than three to six months at a time in any given city and venue, Grande Exhibitions underscores a constant modification of dwelling, perspective, and frames.[22] This international organization, whose dedication to the concept

of a traveling exhibition is utmost, operates much like that of American P.T. Barnum's beloved traveling circus, which displayed animal and human oddities beneath its Big Top. Like this circus, Grande Exhibitions ultimately aims to leave a trace of the visual marvels it carries to and displays at each of its stopovers.

Even if modern-day reproductions are visually appealing, intellectually enthralling, and highly marketable, what Grande Exhibitions has achieved are demonstrations of how, in the twenty-first century, mechanical reproduction does in fact cause the productive decay of aura. In the context of their "Da Vinci—A Genius" exhibition, da Vinci's inventions are dissected facsimiles of ideas presented to the viewer. Unlike the *Notebooks* themselves, which are more a specimen of continuous journal-writing and -thinking rather than a comprehensive textbook, "Da Vinci—A Genius" attempts to represent a systemization and totality that was never there to begin with in order to grant privilege to the viewer. Grande Exhibitions takes da Vinci's early cartoons, preliminary sketches, and outlines for a final work and realizes them literally to confirm his genius for the viewer. Furthermore, Grande Exhibitions promotes the sense that to translate da Vinci's works via mechanical reproduction is to place a frame around the multiplicity of meaning found on the disparate folios themselves. However, this frame remains malleable in that it allows for the act of collecting to be on display as much as the collected objects themselves.

As a purveyor for modern cabinets of curiosity, Grande Exhibitions is the quintessential example of a growing twenty-first century mainstream proclivity for interactive technology as the preferred medium through which knowledge is presented to the masses in museums.[23] In all of its current exhibits, Grande Exhibitions takes advantage of various multi-media projections and constructions to rearrange and reframe continuously the relationship between the objects and viewers. Yet this realignment is consistently dependent on the object's aura; the realignment must echo the object in some manner or else the exhibition would fall prey to being a mere pastiche and not the 'highest quality' it seeks. What Grande Exhibitions accomplishes is thus the privileging of spectatorship over old-fashioned veneration; it reinforces a new form of veneration for the museum-goer, one which is based on displacement, resemblance, and reframing, and which emphasizes an out-of-order, fragmented and sketch-like experience not unlike the renderings found in the fragment folios from da Vinci's *Notebooks.* Just as da Vinci moved from the stance of collector to that of the collected, or curio, Grande Exhibitions emerges as the curiosity that is itself framed by its own collections.

Notes

1. http://davincithegenius.com
2. Sharon Macdonald, 'Collecting Practices', in Macdonald, S. (ed.) *A Companion to Museum Studies*. Oxford: Blackwell; 81.

3. Michel Foucault. 'Of Other Spaces.' *Diacritics* 16. 1: 22.
4. Stephen Greenblatt. *Marvelous Possessions*. Chicago: University of Chicago; 19-24.
5. Stephen Bann. 'The Return to Curiosity: Shifting Paradigms in Contemporary Museum Display', in McClellan, A. (ed.) *Art and its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millennium*. Oxford, Blackwell; 118.
6. RYP Australia Major Projects, *Da Vinci: An Exhibition of Genius* (Brighton, Victoria, Australia: RYP Australia Pty Ltd, 2007); 3. (Note: RYP Australia Major Projects, in partnership with The Anthropos Association, has since been renamed Grande Exhibitions, when it expanded the company's operating footprint from Melbourne, Australia into Rome, Italy.)
7. Ibid, 3. (emphasis mine)
8. http://grandeexhibitions.com/index.php
9. Ibid
10. Robert Zwijnenberg, *The Writing and Drawings of Leonardo da Vinci: Order and Chaos in Early Modern Thought.* Caroline van Eck, trans. (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); 7.
11. Ibid, 7.
12. Ibid, 100.
13. Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994); 1.
14. Ibid, 3.
15. "Anatomical Study of the Muscles of the Leg, c. 1490," Royal Library, Windsor Castle: *The Drawings of Leonardo da Vinci in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen at Windsor Castle*, ed. K. Clark/C. Pedretti, 3 v, London 1968-1969 (first published 1935).
16. Walter Benjamin, " The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations*. Harry Zohn, trans. (New York: Schocken Books Inc., 1955).
17. http://grandeexhibitions.com/VG.php
18. http://grandeexhibitions.com/DesignProduction.php
19. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Great Britain: British Broadcasting Coroporation and Penguin Books, 1972); 7-34.
20. Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 12.
21. http://grandeexhibitions.com/index.php
22. Ibid.
23. Maddalena Dalla Mura , "Re : Focus Design Display Design in Museums: Towards an Integrative Approach: The Potential of Science and Technology Museums," *Journal of Design History* (Oxford University Press on behalf of Design History Society, 22:3 (Sept. 2009); 259-270.

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The Promise of Other Rooms

REBECCA REYNOLDS

Abstract

Creative writing is one way of exploring the curiousness of museums and their collections. The starting point for this piece was the range of period rooms at the Geffrye Museum in East London, although the story does not reproduce the museum's layout and contents exactly, and all the characters and events are fictional. The story could be seen as an exploration of various ways of understanding displays – and the people they represent – as it follows someone who literally enters a display, and who approaches objects through touch, research and the imagination.

Key words: creative writing, fiction, rooms

The room was taking shape before my eyes, a rapid climax to months of preparation. One by one its spaces were filled in, with curtains, fake windows, moiré wallpaper and a white corniced ceiling holding a rigid five-branched chandelier. I watched with Marta, the museum's education officer, who was looking after me, the new intern.

We muttered a half cynical commentary to each other as the pieces arrived.

'Yep. Here it is – the Queen Vic pic,' said Marta. 'We've loads of those in storage. Any excuse to get them out.'

'Oh, I know those,' I said. Victoria with lion cub. Victoria with Albert. Victoria with visiting black person from colony. Ah, here's the sideboard I've heard so much about. How much did they pay for that?'

'Well, that South London dealer wouldn't budge much. It's why you're working for nothing, sweetie'. We laughed. 'Was it worth it, do you think, Janet?'

'Well, it adds to the Victorian brand,' I said.

And so it did, once it was filled with plates and put against the wall. The space was now transformed into 'Drawing room 1870'. The cobweb-thin lines of the Crystal Palace

appeared in a sketch of the Great Exhibition hung above a portrait of a young woman in décolletage. On the other side of the fireplace was a tableau in oils showing a girl in her father's arms, pleading with him to show mercy to a downcast poacher in a sailor suit, standing next to a guard grimly holding up a dead hare. An elaborate wooden children's train set was spread on a round table covered with a green and yellow brocade cloth, its carriages following the curve of the edge. Dominating the room in the centre of the mantelpiece was a glass dome, sheltering an elaborate bouquet of dried flowers.

The gem of the room, I didn't need Marta to tell me, was the carpet, bought at auction years ago and finally brought into the light. The conservationist had worked on it for weeks. Now its dense green foliage and red berries darkened the room and added one more pattern to its many surfaces.

The labelling was up, saying that this was mainly a female domain, where visitors were received, children amused, the piano played for the husband after a hard day's work. On a nearby audioguide were the words of Isabella Beeton describing ways of roasting meat, recommending that servants be treated reasonably, and likening the mistress of the house to the commander of an army. Music the mistress might have played was on another track, a gentle and charming piece. I picked it up to listen, and couldn't help feeling the music enliven the room, turning it into a post-work refuge for the husband and a comfortable family nest.

Before going back to our desks we strolled along the row of period rooms, now completed and displayed like a hand of cards. There were bare cold seventeenth century wooden panels, a modernist 30s living room, and a 70s lounge with geometric rugs and chrome, where you could almost glimpse white trousered thighs, broad lapels and the clink of tall glasses holding gin and tonic.

That night I sank down into our sofa. Mike passed me a glass of wine.

'How's it shaping up?' he asked. Any more thoughts on career plans? Don't forget what you said when you started – you didn't want to spend your life in an army of Lauras, Lucys and Juliets, working for a pittance in the cause of cultural enlightenment.'

'I'll keep you posted', I replied. I don't think I'm in the army yet.'

'Well, you could always see if the uni can fix you up with a placement at an investment bank'. He smiled.

I laughed uneasily. 'If we're ever going to get our own place I might have to.' We settled down to watch a thriller.

Part of my work placement was to be on attendant duty for an hour a day during lunch hour. I usually spent this perched on the window sill opposite the row of rooms, answering

the occasional query from a visitor. I found myself forced into intimacy with the spaces and soon got to know them well. After a while I had to admit that the drawing room was the only one with staying power. It was full of things, topics, issues – the outside was in. The oil painting faced you with a challenge, asking you whether the girl's affection win over the father or the poacher be turned in. The empire picture was a reminder of status and responsibility. Even the demure young woman with bare shoulders stared out intensely, as though occupied with important thoughts. And yet I found it oppressive too – hardly any relaxing blankness, so many spaces asking for a judgment or at least a response.

I became curious about the room and went to see Sal, the archivist, to try and find out where the furniture came from. She got out some files and said she could give me half an hour.

'We know quite a bit about them, comparatively,' she said. 'Most of it was owned by a family in Tunbridge Wells. Let me see - Ellenham, they were called. Husband was a manager or senior clerk in a London bank. Sadly, Mrs E died young – probably having her second child. Most of the things came from a descendant – he lives fairly near here now, actually. He's called….Kyle Masterson. His address is here if you want to know more – he was quite happy to talk. And there's this.' She pushed a box over the table.

I opened the top. To my surprise, I found the beginnings of a music manuscript. Spidery faded notes decorated the first few lines, then petered out. After that was page upon blank page, unused. 'We don't know what that is', said Sal. We found it in the desk when it arrived. We're not really sure what to do with it.'

I imagined the music had been started by the woman, then put aside for other duties. Maybe she'd never had a chance to develop her talents before she died; perhaps she lacked confidence.

Perhaps as a result of this new knowledge, during that week, while I was on attendant duty, the family started to appear. I didn't see much of the husband – he worked long hours. The woman was there more often. She would sit at the desk with her back to me, writing letters, only the nape of her neck visible above her dress. Sometimes she played short pieces on the piano. She was withdrawn but I knew she was clever. I liked her best when I saw her flirting mildly with male visitors, or briefly staring into space after licking an envelope, or giving herself the odd questioning look in the mirror.

The following week I stayed late to finish a cataloguing task. Locking the office behind me, I found the building in silence and near darkness. The exhibits usually subtly changed their nature at this time - half alive, even slightly threatening, as though I had crossed to their territory. Walking past the drawing room, I made out the mirror and pictures, dark shapes against the wallpaper. I caught a sudden movement at the desk and felt a rush of

excitement. I had to know more. Without pausing to think, I glanced up and down the passageway, took a deep breath and stepped quickly over the barrier.

I couldn't see anything, but I could feel the carpet, and smelt mustiness. The presence had disappeared. The objects had changed, becoming more tangible and less decipherable than they had been in daylight. The woman in décolletage was no more than a glinting surface.

Moving forward blindly, I knocked my hip against the edge of the table. I felt my way around it, and reached towards the desk. There was a smooth curved surface, and I realised the scroll lid was down. I couldn't lift it. I moved to the left and put my fingertips on the dried flower dome, instead, feeling absurdly timid. Surprisingly, it was light and thin, not heavy as it had looked. I ran my hands over it, tracing the curves down to the edge of the glass at the base. I displaced the plinth slightly and pushed my fingers up inside the case, touching the spikiness of the plant stems. I tilted it on the edge of the mantelpiece, feeling its weight against my palms. I thought for a minute about letting it drop, then stood it upright again. I scuffed the carpet with a heel, then lifted the brocade tablecloth and scratched my fingernail along the table. I could feel other minute scratches there. A dark shape moved indistinctly in the mirror. Taking fright, I stepped back over the barrier and left.

The next day Marta gestured me into her office at the end of the morning meeting. I followed her nervously, then relaxed as she started speaking. 'I've got something you might be interested in, Janet. Our sister museum needs a hand, admin – paid. You could go there for the rest of your time. Fancy it?'

I disguised my relief with gratitude as I thanked Marta and told her how much I appreciated her help. But later that day I felt dissatisfied, and felt there was some unfinished business with the woman in the room. I dug out the name Sal had given me and phoned the man who had given the furniture, making an appointment to visit two days later.

It turned out Kyle Masterson lived just off Hoxton Square, where the old warehouses were being converted and art galleries springing up alongside council flats. I climbed up three flights of stairs in a tall, narrow building and a slim man in his 40s opened the door to me, showing the white walls of a modern loft conversion.

'I feel I should apologise to you, 'he said, 'I've never been to see the furniture, even though it's round the corner.'

'Oh, don't worry', I said, 'there's no obligation. I'm here because... well, I wanted to find out more.'

'I don't know anything I haven't already told the museum,' said Kyle. I never knew my great-grandmother. There are these photos, but the museum has already been through them. They're from my sister. She's the family hoarder.'

I looked through the folder while Kyle made coffee. They were sepia and black-and-white photographs, mainly studio portraits. I picked out a family group of three, faces peering grimly out from bonnets and high necklines. I couldn't relate them to the woman I knew. Kyle came back with the coffee and looked over my shoulder.

'How did they move, those Victorians?' he said. 'Such a weight of stuff. It's like their faces are the only real bit of them you can see.'

I peered closer but could make out nothing behind the stiff poses and dark eyes. I took up a newer black and white photograph. 'Who's this?'

The photo had a 20s look. A woman stood on the deck of a ship, leaning against the rails, her hair blown across her face. She was wearing lipstick and smiling, her scarf and skirt blown to one side by the wind.

'Oh, I think she's a distant cousin I think. She would have been... ' he thought. 'Yeah, I guess my great-grandmother's niece. Or something. Family legend says she became a singer and did some work with bands on cruise liners - spent 10 years or so zipping round the world. Rather glam, eh?'

It was a captivating picture. As I looked at it, the piano music from the drawing room floated into my head.

'Can I take it?' I asked Kyle. 'I'll leave a form here.'

'Sure', he replied. 'Take anything you want. Glad it's of use.'

On my last day in the museum I deliberately stayed behind. I needed to leave something for the woman before going. More confidently now, I climbed over the barrier, and went to the table. Lifting the brocade, I slipped underneath it the photo of the singer on the ship. I wanted it to stay there, to be part of this home. A homage to Mrs Ellenham. A time bomb. A promise of other rooms.

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Super Ghost Me:
Stories from the 'Other Side' of the Museum

MARIANA LAMAS AND EDUARDO GIMÉNEZ-CASSINA

Abstract

Supernatural stories are part of our heritage and express our identity. Several museums around the world focus on the supernatural world in various ways: they present stories about spirits, occult happenings, famous apparitions and ghost hunters. However, these accounts often bare a social stigma, which frequently induce museums to conceal and remove these stories from the public realm. This paper aims to bring to light supernatural stories connected to museums located in different parts of the world such as Brazil, Spain, Netherlands and Kenya. Such accounts might be connected to the building, the collection, and the history of the institution, and to the people who worked there, as well as, to the intangible dimension of heritage. In this paper we shall argue that, going beyond mere market strategies to attract audiences, heritage institutions could use the metaphysical world as a powerful vehicle to create bonds with their potential audience.

Keywords: Ghosts, Supernatural, Audience Development, Intangible Heritage.

The Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam has three Batak wands on display with alleged magical power that were used in rituals. A few years ago, the glass of the showcase where the objects were shown developed a crack. What caused the crack is unknown. The museum replaced the glass but not long later the new glass developed a crack in the same place. Was this just coincidence or was it a supernatural phenomenon?

Interest in the supernatural is nothing new. For centuries people have used the supernatural to interpret events and natural occurrences that they could not explain scientifically[1]. We live in a rational world, yet why are we still so fascinated by the supernatural? One could think that the advances in science might have dramatically lessened our interest in the supernatural. Conversely, we seem more and more interested in supernatural topics.

Nowadays, the supernatural is no longer a way to explain things we do not understand, but it is a way of explaining things that challenge scientific explanation.

Everyone has heard a story about the supernatural world at least once in his or her life. Some tales are related to folklore, others to haunted places, while others to history. These stories are part of our intangible heritage and express our identity. Supernatural phenomena have also occurred in museums. Supernatural phenomena have also occurred in museums, but little research has been carried out in this field.

Museums, traditionally regarded as institutions that stand for what is real, scientific and empiric (Taalas 1999), have often shied away from engaging with matters of alternative science that has usually been perceived as non-scientific. This research is an attempt to engage with this alternative science and discuss supernatural phenomena in museums in order to start investigating this unexplored subject. It focuses on the supernatural and paranormal activity occurring in institutions of different natures, such as artistic, anthropological, historical, and scientific museums. While reporting these supernatural accounts, we seek to highlight the intangible dimension of museums and their collections and to discuss the different reasons why museums have many supernatural accounts. We also suggest that museums could use these accounts for audience development, building better relationships with their visitors and attracting new audiences.

The challenges encountered during our research – lack of existing literature and unwillingness of museum professionals to openly comment on supernatural accounts – work in conjunction with the museum's tendency, previously mentioned, to avoid engaging with supernatural matters. In some cases, such as the Museo Reina-Sofia (RIPPLEY 8 2009) and Jane Adams Hull-House Museum (Kachuba 2005), staff members are even asked to abide to a confidentiality clause which forbids them to publicly speak about supernatural phenomenon happening in these museums.

In most cases social taboos and prejudice among museum professionals have prevented supernatural stories from being openly discussed and shared. As a result, in order to collect accounts of paranormal activity in museums, we have resorted to personal accounts from museum staff (some of them anonymous since the professionals we talked to did not want to be linked with the subject), visitors, psychic professionals, as well as newspaper articles, and TV shows such as 'Ghost Hunters' and 'Most Haunted'.

Museums and the supernatural

During our research we came across not only numerous supernatural accounts, but also we could identify a variety of approaches taken by museums to address the supernatural. While relatively many museums use the supernatural in their exhibition and/or activities, other institutions choose to ignore their supernatural stories, even though they are well known

outside the institution. Some museums only engage with the supernatural on Halloween, while a few institutions focus on the supernatural.

Among the museums that focus on the supernatural, there is the Draugasetrid - Icelandic Center for Ghosts, which features Iceland's most famous ghosts. In the Draugasetrid visitors have the chance to experience ghost stories in reconstructions of the environments where they happened. This institution acknowledges and celebrates the presence of supernatural beings in their facilities. According to Berglind Harðardótti (2011), an employee of the museum, every day the museum staff leaves a plate with food for the male ghosts that haunt the site as it is believed that male ghosts act more favourably towards their hosts if they have something to eat.

The Ghost Museum in Prague, which opened in 2008, displays the most famous and interesting ghosts and legends of Prague. The aim of the museum is to make the visitors aware of the mystic and magic events of Prague history. Similar online initiatives exist, such as the Haunted Museum, a virtual museum, managed by the American Haunting and Dark Haven Entertainment, which collects paranormal and ghost related stories[2].

Besides museums about the supernatural, in countries where Halloween is celebrated as annual holiday, museums often host events related to the supernatural to commemorate the event, such as the Auckland Museum, Vancouver Police Museum, London Canal Museum. If most of the events are about the supernatural as a specific phenomenon, some are about the supernatural stories of the museum. If many museums organise exhibitions about the supernatural, they are not usually related to the supernatural stories of their institutions.

Museums such as the Peterborough Museum in Peterborough (UK) and the Iron Island Museum in Buffalo (USA) actively engage their visitors with the supernatural phenomena that happen within their walls.

The Peterborough Museum is considered one of the most haunted sites in the city of Peterborough. The museum offers a candlelit ghost tour to uncover some of its ghost stories. At least eight different ghosts are believed to haunt the place. One of them is said to be a First World War soldier that is thought to have died in the museum in 1916, when the building was used as a hospital. In the museum attic a ghost cam has been installed. The images recorded by the cam are shown live on the museums website and people are invited to spot a ghost.

The Iron Island Museum is a neighbourhood museum that was founded in 2000 to preserve the history of the area. In the 19th century the museums building used to be a Methodist-Episcopal church and it became a funeral home in the 1950s. Staff and visitors have often reported seeing shadow figures, small children, cold spots, and have described a feeling of being followed, locked doors have been founded unlocked and opened. The museum offers

an overnight ghost hunting tour and provides audio evidences of the presence of ghosts on its website, such as videos including one about the Ghost Hunters[3] investigation of the museum.

Other museums have also spoken out about their supernatural dimension but have done so in a much quieter fashion. The Yusuf Al-Burch Museum of Moorish Architecture in Caceres (Spain) is known for being hunted by the spirit of a woman who grieved over her love interest. This belief has been used to raise the museum's profile through media exposure and draw a larger audience into the building. Visitors are mostly attracted by the supernatural than the museum collection *per se* (Donde Viajamos 2011). Stories of visitors that have felt the ghost's hugs and a 'very powerful breeze that throws you to the ground' as they moved from room to room have brought attention to the site. Some accounts narrate that once an eight-kilogram flowerpot was flying above their heads and lights were turning on and off (García Durán 2009).

The Tower of London is known for hosting several ghosts of its past residents: from the beheaded Anne Boleyn to the two young princes, sons of Edward IV, to Lady Jane Grey. Accounts of ghosts' sightings, most of which are of aristocratic upbringing, date back to the 17th Century. Other strange sightings include 'phantom funeral carriages' and 'a lovely veiled lady that, upon closer look proves to have a black void where her face should be' (Guide to Castles of Europe 2011). As the museum acknowledges the significant role these accounts hold, regarding it as crucial to the intangible heritage of the site[4], it has created a space on its website specially dedicated to its supernatural stories. Without taking over the main mission of the museum, this space rather seeks to complement it. The section is included in the 'stories' section of the website; this represents an unusual example where the supernatural accounts are considered part of the intangible heritage and biography of the institution.

Whether celebrated or not, the nature of paranormal activity in the museum can be classified in three different categories, which will be discussed hereafter. Paranormal activities can be connected to the museum's collection, to the physical space of the museum or have another type of affiliation with the institution.

The Museum's Relationship with the Supernatural

Why do museums have so many supernatural accounts? According to popular belief (Juliano, 2011) a ghost can be found almost everywhere. It is thought that in order to materialise themselves, ghosts need a great deal of energy. This is thought to be one of the reasons why they are commonly seen in large places that are frequented by a high number of people, since large numbers of persons are thought to produce a lot of energy. The International Ghost Hunters Society (2011) suggests that ghosts tend to remain in a place that had some meaning to them in life or that they considered to be their own, such as their former home, work place or even their place of death. Ghosts are also often seen where

pain and suffering occurred. According to Windsor (2010), many ghost hunters believe that ghosts tend to haunt places that were the source of their personal pain and suffering since they want other people to know their experiences in that place.

Besides being places that often attracts many visitors, in our view museums tend to attract ghosts for the three different reasons previously mentioned. Firstly, the museum building: museums are often located in historical buildings that were previously used for other functions before being transformed into museums, such as hospitals, convents, churches, prisons, etc. As a result, it is frequent to find museum ghosts that are somehow attached to the former function of the building. According to the stories we have collected, this is the primary reason for a museum's ghost. Secondly, the objects held or shown in the museum: the ghost could be the original owner of the object or be related to its previous function. Regarding the owner, if people are attached to an object in life, they may continue to be attached to it in death. In this case the sense of ownership remains as so does the ghost. Regarding the function, objects that are sacred or were used in ceremonies and rituals have a high amount of energy. This energy can be manifested in different forms and can attract different ghosts that were connected to these objects when they were still alive. Thirdly, the museum institution: museum employees are often told to return to the museum after their death. As workplaces, museums may inspire a great love from people who worked there who might return to it after death.

Ghosts of the museum - Supernatural Accounts

We have collected these supernatural accounts in a variety of different institutions, from well-known art museums, such as the Reina Sofía in Madrid, to small institutions such as the Giriama Community Museum in Mombasa. In these institutions the subject matter of the museum might be central or not to the supernatural events. However, these events add a new account to the biography of the institution or the object, providing a new historical or cultural layer.

Hereafter, we present some examples classified according to their nature in the three categories previously introduced: object, building or institution based stories. Undoubtedly, each museum may fit in more than one category.

Previous Owners – Object Based

As mentioned earlier, the Tropenmuseum, an ethnographic museum located in Amsterdam, had three Batak magic wands[5] on display that were used in rituals. A few years ago, the glass of the showcase where the magic wands were displayed, which was a bulletproof glass, suddenly developed a crack. What caused the crack is unknown. The museum replaced the glass but not long later the new glass developed a crack in the same place. What caused the second crack is also unknown. It could be suggested that the magic powers

of the wands caused the cracks. In the old Batak tradition these objects are considered to be inhabited by spirits. Currently only one wand is on display.

The staff members at Tropenmuseum that we contacted were reluctant to give us information about both the incidents and the objects themselves. This is an example of the taboos and prejudice among the museum professionals we referred to earlier.

Former Inhabitants – Building based

A notorious example of supernatural presence in a museum connected to the building's biography and its previous uses is the Museum of Modern Art Reina Sofía. The museum opened in 1986 in the former hospital San Carlos located right in the centre of Madrid, which was run by nuns belonging to the order of Charity. During the refurbishment carried out before the opening, a few workers reported lights and screams that were told to happen especially at night (Iker Jiménez in RIPPLEY8 2009). It was not long before several other sources, from museum visitors to night guards and cleaning staff, started reporting other strange phenomena: from shadows of nuns being seen along the corridors, to the iconic lifts on the façade turning on and moving during the night-time (when the engines of the lift were plugged off) (Idem).

The psychic group Hepta[6] was invited by the museum to investigate these phenomena on two occasions (in 1992 and 1995). During their research they came across tombs that had long been forgotten in the basement of the building (Paloma Navarrete in RIPPLEY8 2009) and witnessed and documented several extraordinary events, such as sounds of clinking rosaries and rushed steps or flickering lights. In 1998 one of the security guards requested sick leave because during her shifts she felt 'possessed'. Her co-workers confirmed that when she was guarding the corridors, her facial expression was twisted and she had a child-like voice (RIPPLEY8 2009). Since then, several visitors and staff have continued witnessing paranormal activity within the museum's walls. The museum has attempted, fairly unsuccessfully, to hide these stories and despite media attention the institution does not make any reference to them on its website. The lack of public recognition of such accounts is probably due to the fear of the museum's management of public reaction. We wish to suggest that this is due to the stigma attached to the supernatural world and the museum's preoccupation that it could work in detriment for the institutional image. As a result, the museum deliberately prefers not referring to the previous use of the building, a former hospital.

The Belgrave Hall, located in Leicester, UK, made headlines in 1998 after a ghost was photographed by a security camera. Leicester City Council invited the International Society for Paranormal Research (ISPR)[7] to explore the Hall to find out if it was haunted or not (Batt 1999). The investigators reported that there was not only one ghost but quite a few living in the Hall. They concluded that the ghosts were friendly, except for one male ghost, who was thought to be possibly dangerous and best left alone. They also added that the image

caught in the security camera was created by atmospheric conditions and not to paranormal phenomena (MysteryMag 1999). Since then ghosts sightings in the Hall have continued to be reported for years. Some of the ghosts are thought to be the daughters of one of the original owners, John Ellis, who was responsible for bringing the railways to Leicester in 1833. Charlotte Ellis lived in the house with her seven sisters, five of whom died whilst residing at Belgrave Hall, including Charlotte (Castle of the Spirit 2002). In addition to the ghosts, people have also reported the smell of freshly baked bread and gingerbread when no one had been cooking in the Hall.

In 2003, the TV show Most Haunted[8] went to Belgrave Hall to investigate the phenomena. While trying to make contacts with the spirits two crew members fainted and it was decided that no one should go anywhere in the house alone because it was not safe. In 2008, it was the TV show Ghost Hunters International that investigated the Hall. They concluded that Belgrave Hall is one of the most haunted places in the UK.

The Belgrave Hall became the focus of media attention not for the heritage it presents, but rather for its paranormal phenomena deeply connected to the history of the building. As previously mentioned, after 1998, year when an alleged ghost was caught by a security camera, the museum became famous worldwide. The museum staff has openly discussed the Hall's supernatural accounts, and helped ISPR investigation back in 1999.

At the Edgar Allan Poe Museum, located in Richmond, Virginia, USA, a shadow - claimed to be that of Edgar Allan Poe - has been seen walking around the museum, especially in the garden (Vargas 2008). In the backyard of the museum, a popular place for local newlyweds to have their pictures taken, many brides and grooms have been surprised to see the image of a boy and a girl playing in the background of their photographs, even if there were no children while the pictures were taken. The figures are believed to be the children of the first owners of the house, a German immigrant family (*idem*).

Similarly, the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, populated with mummies, is famous for the abundant legends of mummy ghosts and curses (Dublinmick 2011). Even if the museum does not publicise them officially, some staff members acknowledge the metaphysical powers of the contents in the museum. For example, the curator of King Tutankhamen claims that the pharaoh's trumpets 'retain magical powers' triggering a halo of destruction and death once they are played (Finn 2011).

Former Employees – Institution based

The Anthropological Museum of Madrid provides a good example of a paranormal story attached to the institution. Dr Velasco was a man from a humble background that eventually founded the Anthropological Museum in Madrid. Trained as a surgeon, he developed a passion for the preservation of human bodies, as well as for collecting foetuses and mummies from Egypt to Peru. Shortly after the museum was founded, his only

daughter, Conchita, died at age 15. The devastating event shocked Dr Velasco so deeply that he devoted the rest of his life to the preservation of his daughter's body that he embalmed. Dr Velasco used to sit his daughter's mummified body with him at dinnertime and to take it out on the streets in a carriage. The story says that on one occasion he even took the remains of his daughter to the Opera. People came to know about this and the legend was created. This story nourished the imagination of writers such as Ramon J. Sender and Santiago Grisolía (Pinela-Valseca 2010). The famous mummy ended up at the Anatomic University of Madrid, where it is still displayed today (*idem*).

Another example is the National Historical Museum, which is considered to be the most haunted museum in Rio de Janeiro and the second building with the highest number of ghosts in the Brazil (Texeira 2011). Although the museum does not speak publicly about its supernatural phenomena, on different occasions it has allowed mediums to investigate the museum. During one of these investigations a medium spoke for a long time with an old man who criticised some aspects of the museum, especially the exhibitions, and warned about some books from the collection that were missing (Texeira 2011). The medium found out later that the old man was Gustavo Barroso, who died in 1959 and was the founder of the museum as well as of the first museology course in Brazil, which was offered at and managed by the National Historical Museum. In addition, museum staff has reported the smell of pipe at the end of the afternoon that, they believe, would confirm Gustavo's presence since he used to smoke a pipe. But Gustavo Barroso was not the only ghost to express his ideas about the museum. During another investigation a medium spoke to the ghost of a man who talked about the importance of the museum suggesting that people should honour the institution since 'it is the house of national memory and not a deposit of remembrance' (Texeira 2011).

Another supernatural account of the National Historical Museum can be found in the room where the Battle of Riachuelo painting is displayed. In the room the same supernatural phenomenon happens that is often seen by the museum staff and visitors: a group of young military men arguing and complaining about their working conditions (Texeira 2011). Apart from these ghosts inhabiting the museum, it is said that the fountain located in the middle of the patio is a gateway to a group of angels. One suggested explanation for the presence of angles in the museum is the high number of ghosts living there. The angels would try to help the troubled ghosts to find peace.

Museum Ghosts as a tool for audience development

Whether museums acknowledge their ghosts, transform them into legends or deny them because of social taboos and prejudice, in our view the supernatural can be a powerful vehicle for audience development.

Contemporary societies tend to be receptive to supernatural phenomena. Recent polls show that people in the West are more likely to believe in ghosts and aliens (58%) than they are in

God (54%) (The Daily Mail 2008). Over a third of Americans is thought to believe in haunted houses, and one in five thinks it is possible to communicate with dead people (MSNBC 2008). These data suggest the extraordinary potential that the supernatural holds for museums. Such a powerful tool should be used wisely as it can also be an effective means to attract new audiences.

Museums are often perceived as scientific institutions that stand for 'the truth', for what is real (Taalas 1999). Museum professionals tend to believe that the idea of providing a space for the discussion of supernatural phenomena would jeopardise the museum's integrity and reputation as a factual institution. The stigma and fear associated to ghosts, as well as more sinister aspects of the paranormal that are often represented in popular culture, might not seem to align with the museum's mission. However, providing a space for ghostly accounts does not necessarily conflict with the institutional goals. The paranormal dimension should be understood as yet another facet of the museum's history and identity. Acknowledging this aspect would contribute to deepen the context in which the organization sits. As shown above, some institutions like the Peterborough Museum or the Tower of London successfully intertwine supernatural narratives in the history of their institutions. By providing the visitor with a more inclusive version of their histories it could be argued that these museums trigger a process of *humanization* of the institution, the building and the collection. Supernatural accounts can provide historical and environmental frameworks that the audience can relate to, placing the museum in a different dimension that goes beyond the built entity and its artefacts.

We wish to suggest that the metaphysical world should also be conceived as an opportunity to attract new audiences. Often many communities that are under-represented in museums fall within the groups considered to be 'socially excluded' in society at large (Black 2005:49). Scholars such as Richard Sandell (1998) argue for the acknowledgement of the museum's potential to fight the causes and symptoms of social inclusion. Ghost stories might not only increase people's interest for museums but could also create a bridge that might enable these institutions to reach out to groups of the population who would normally not venture into museums, thus providing a new access to the heritage sphere. These actions will not need to be targeted at specific groups; because of the extent the paranormal world is present in contemporary society, it would have the potential to attract a wide spectrum of individuals.

However, telling ghost stories should not be understood as a strategy to attract new visitors applicable to every museum: only those institutions whose history clearly connects to the metaphysical world should draw on it to broaden their visitor spectrum. They should develop innovative and site-specific strategies to use ghost stories as a tool for audience development, avoiding mimicry and banalization of the metaphysical presence, while incorporating them into the institution's biography. If the paranormal happening is related, for instance, to an object it can be a powerful tool for educators to use to connect with

cultural aspects. However, ethical dilemmas arise such as to what extent is it commendable to lure visitors purely using a ghost story or how to negotiate with the different belief systems that visitors might have regarding the metaphysical world. The stigma that the paranormal world has in society at large should also be taken into consideration. Yet, acknowledging and identifying metaphysical accounts might turn people away whose believes collapse with the existence, or are simply scared, of ghosts.

Openly discussing supernatural phenomenon is also a highly culturally sensitive area. In this respect the socio-cultural context in which the museum is placed should be taken into account. Different strategies should be devised for museums based in societies that are highly receptive to the metaphysical world, such as Iceland or the United Kingdom, or societies where the supernatural acquires a quasi-religious and mystical role such as South East Asia. Museums that deal with the interaction between accepted belief-systems at a community level and the metaphysical world often include death and veneration of ancestors amongst theirs themes. An example of this model is the Giriama Community Museum in the Swahili coast, North of the Kenyan town of Mombasa, a museum that through intangible heritage practices seeks to re-enact rituals that put visitors and the local community in touch with their deceased ancestors (Abungu 2011). Another case in which the supernatural has an added religious dimension is the Negeri Simbalan's State Museum in Malaysia, where a temporary exhibition about ghost belief - a common practice in rural Malaysia that reached its height in the 16th Century - was cancelled after a fatwa was issued declaring the exhibition inappropriate (Nation 2007).

Shocking and publicity-seeking attitudes regarding the paranormal happenings that overshadow the museum's mission and the institution itself should be avoided. Ghostly narratives should be understood as a complement to the biography and not overshadow it, unless the museum's subject matter is about paranormal happenings, such as the Draugasetrid Centre in Iceland. Thus ghostly narratives should be carefully thought out and sensibly presented; possibly, the museum should try to involve a variety of community gatekeepers throughout the process of exhibition-making. Such an approach would ensure a kaleidoscopic representation of attitudes and approaches to the supernatural world. This model would follow the multi-vocal approach to exhibitions that many museums increasingly apply, involving the target community in the elaboration of the show. This multi-polarised vision would allow the creation of a platform for dialogue, transforming exhibitions into spaces where relevant questions are raised and where visitors are asked to draw their own conclusions.

An insensitive approach would be detrimental for the museum's institutional identity, as it might transfer the existing prejudice about the paranormal world to the museums itself. While a sensitive and carefully devised plan would enrich the museum's brand, adding an extra dimension to the institution's image. The museum institution could also provide a

forum, creating a meeting point between museum and psychic professionals. In the museum the latter could deepen their work and research in the paranormal field.

Going beyond mere market strategies to attract new people, heritage institutions could use the metaphysical world to deepen bonds with their existing (physical) audience. The paranormal world can be an excellent vehicle for museums to forge better relationships with their visitors, providing a platform for new encounters and generating curiosity and knowledge about the institutions' history, buildings and collections. Institutions with a paranormal presence should develop this resource by fully realizing its potential and using it as a way of opening to other dimensions of life that also inhabit museums.

Notes

1. For example, in ancient Greece the myth of Helios was used to explain sunrise and sunset. According to the myth, each morning at dawn Helios, the god of the sun, rises from the ocean in the East and rides in his chariot of fire, pulled by four horses, through the sky, to descend at night in the West. In the Middle Ages, it was believed that an eclipse meant a monster was eating the sun.
2. For more information, see http://www.prairieghosts.com/museum.html
3. Ghost Hunters is an American paranormal reality television series on Syfy Channel. The programme features paranormal investigators Jason Hawes and Grant Wilson who investigate places that are reported to be haunted.
4. The ghosts section of the Tower of London website is available at: http://www.hrp.org.uk/TowerOfLondon/stories/ghosts.aspx
5. The magical wand 'tunggal panaluan' is one of the main attributes of a Batak priest. Priests used them in rituals that involved the whole community, for example rainmaking, war ceremonies, harm enemies and rituals for averting epidemics. Magical powers are believed to be attached to the wand by images carved on its surface of interwoven snakes, lizards and other animals. These symbols are connected with Batak's cosmological beliefs (Kunstkamera 2011).
6. The Hepta Group is composed by professionals from different fields working together to investigate paranormal events. More information can be found at http://grupohepta.com/historia.html
7. The International Society for Paranormal Investigation was created in 1972 by Dr. Larry Montz, who is considered the leading authority in Parapsychology worldwide. Montz was the first Parapsychologist to work professionally in the field and to employ in his business people with enhanced Psi abilities (clairvoyance,

clairaudience, remote viewing , energy manipulation, physical mediumship, empathy, among others.) and create a 'Team' combining both scientific and clairvoyant methodologies, which lead to the development of Enhanced Field Parapsychology (ISPR 2010).

8. Most Haunted is a British paranormal reality television series. It was broadcast on Living and Channel One and presented by Ivette Fielding. The programme investigated places in the UK and other countries, attempting several different methods to explore the psychology and science behind reported ghostly phenomena.

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Apocalypse Then

Welcome

Many centuries ago, in a new beginning, human beings began to emerge from the debris of a world shattered by a long-forgotten cataclysm. They began to repopulate the planet *Er, The* (pronounced: Er, The) and recreate lost technology.

These Early People renamed our race 'New Family'.

Eventually, it was thought that it might be a good idea to piece together exactly what had happened to our ancestors. After much moaning and several years of committee meetings everyone agreed to get some robots to do it.

By scavenging amongst the ashes of old cities the robots were able to establish that, approximately 500 years before the New Family, a Bad Money Thing happened which left everyone really, really poor. In order to address the economic crisis, governments sold their citizens to global corporations to be used as advertising space; all flesh was considered a commodity or resource.

In the end there was nothing and nobody left to be sold off and then practically everybody died because they were hungry and stupid.

And there was a giant comet that crashed into the planet.

Or something.

Apocalypse Then

The Exhibition

In the 223rd year of the New Family, the body of Emily 1 was discovered in one of the arid valleys of *Er, The*; our once fertile planet. Emily was a female human thought to have died approximately 370 years ago, aged 14. Forensic tests showed that, during her brief lifespan, the girl had been exploited by various corporations for industrial use:
Emily 1 was the first Privatised Child.

Hundreds of other skeletons have since been found; men and women of different ages and ethnicities. The ordinal *Emily System* of taxonomy is now used for all ancient human remains:
Emily 2 is the body of a middle aged man found in a long combusted people-node.
Emily 3 was a grandma/lake purifier.

Along with the bodies our robots recovered various artefacts. *objects d'art* and items of religious significance.

Apocalypse Then attempts to squint through the bifocals of history and examine the few remaining artefacts from the distant past as presented in this exhibition. The pieces on display have been cleaned up by our most dextrous robots and their usage has been interpreted by our finest historical experts.

We hope you enjoy exploring the objects and imagining how our toothless and wretched Pre-Familian ancestors must have struggled in their everyday lives with such low-brow and inefficient technology.

Trade & Money
DINKY
PUMA

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Objectives

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